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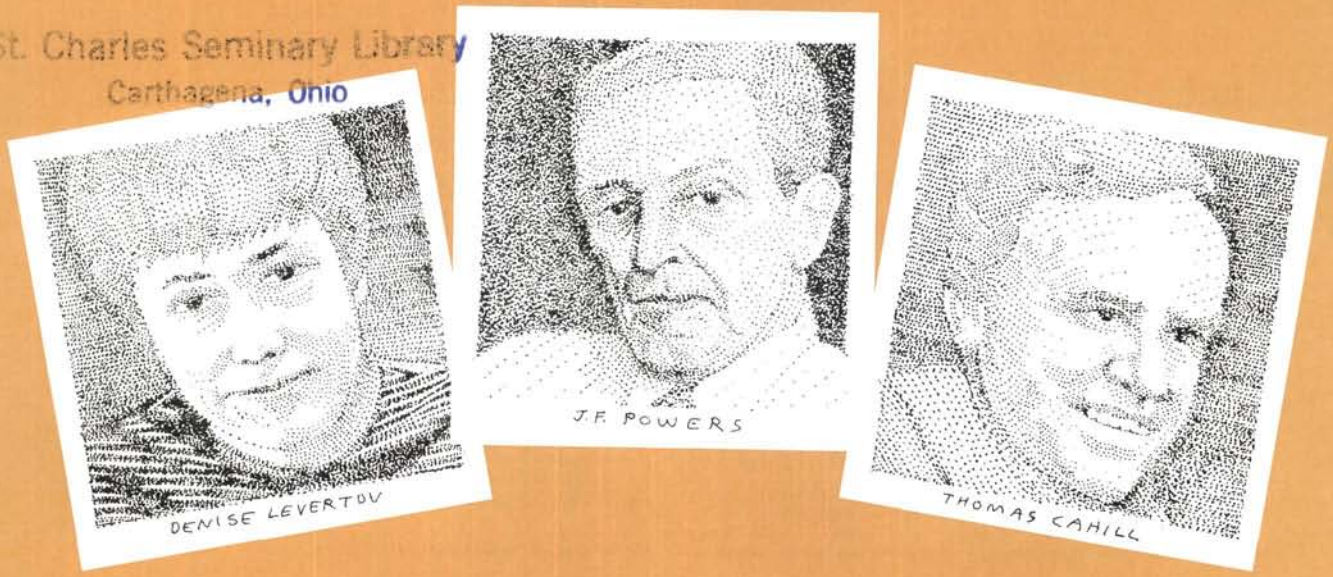

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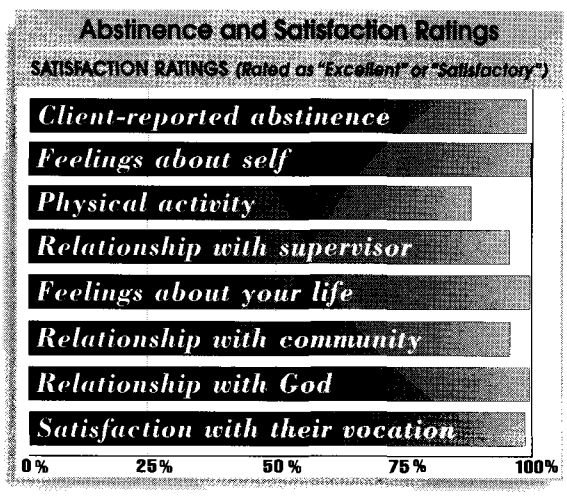

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COMMONWEAL

May 8, 1998 / Volume CXXV, Number 9

CONTENTS

Correspondence *Diverse views on the church and the* Shoah*; the state of theology.* 4

Editorial *Not an editorial* 5

A fearless voice: Denise Levertov
Harold Isbell 6

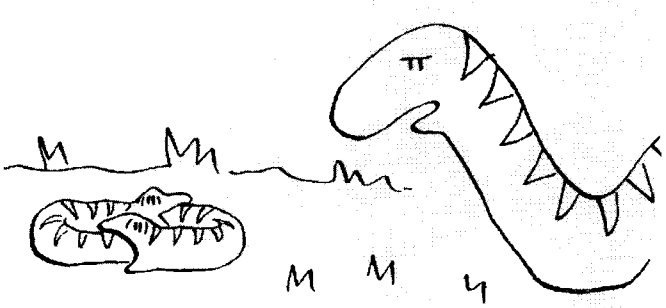
COLUMNIST

Visions & other gifts
Sidney Callahan
What happens when the BVM appears to a woman with a Ph.D. in psychology? 7

SHORT TAKE

Union destruction act
Kelly Candaele
Peter Dreier
The political power of false labeling. 8

Northern Ireland
Edward McGlynn Gaffney
Will Good Friday 1998 someday rival Easter 1916 in the annals of Irish history? 10



"I don't care who *started it!"*

ARTICLES

CLERICAL CHARACTER(S)
J.V. Long
The midcentury Catholic world of J.F. Powers's fiction has long since passed away. Do his stories still hold up? 11

POEM

A Love Song
Michelle Moore 21

CURRENTS

STAGE

Saint Nicholas
Art
Celia Wren
Playwrights put critics at risk. 15

MEDIA

A lapse in taste
William Pfaff
Has the New Yorker *outlived its natural life span?* 16

BOOKS

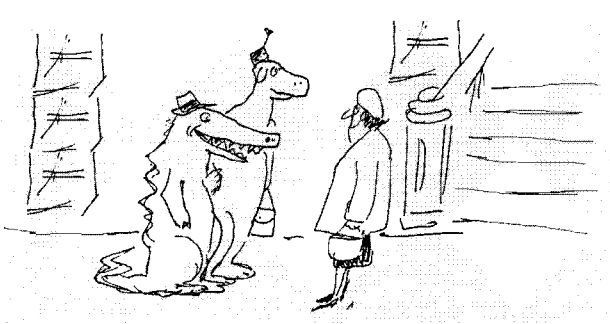
Quarantine
by Jim Crace
Luke Timothy Johnson 18

Maybe One
by Bill McKibben
Barbara Dafoe Whitehead 20

The Gifts of the Jews
by Thomas Cahill
Paul Gediman 22

Enduring Love
by Ian McEwan
Valerie Sayers 24

Thrones and Dominations
by Dorothy Sayers & Jill Paton Walsh
Elizabeth Bartelme 26



"We found each other at a party. It was a gut feeling."

THE LAST WORD

The Communion dress
Kathleen Hage 31

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To the Editors

Rational, but brief

I have subscribed to your magazine for only a short time, but am enjoying it immensely, not the least for its condensation of rational discourse into so few pages! I am a lifelong Protestant, still searching for a church that combines conservative faith with skeptical, intelligent, yet hopeful reasoning. I found John Garvey's "How Is the Bible True?" [March 27] to be very reflective of my own viewpoint, one I haven't been able to put into words, so that I appreciated his articulation of it. I'd like to add this quotation from George MacDonald concerning the Holy Scriptures:

"This story may not be just as the Lord told it, and yet may contain in its mirror as much of truth as we are able to receive, and as will afford us scope for a life's discovery. The modifying influence of the human channels may be essential to God's revealing mode."

I thank John Garvey for this article.

CELIA CUMMINGS
El Granada, Calif.

The church & the Shoah

In *Commonweal*'s interpretation, the Vatican statement, "We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah," argues that "there was no connection between nearly 2,000 years of church-inspired anti-Semitism and Nazi race hatred" ("Misremembered," editorial, April 10). This may be too narrow (or too exaggerated) an interpretation.

First, "anti-Judaism" needs to be used here, since "anti-Semitism" as such was only invented in the nineteenth century, and the concept of pseudo-scientific racialism upon which it depends was developed only a short time before that.

Second, the document should not in my judgment be read to preclude "any connection" between Christian anti-Judaism (which is a theological polemic against the tenets of Jewish faith) and modern racial anti-Semitism (which is directed against Jews as a people). While the document does not specifically state how a connection is to be made, in my reading it leaves plenty of room for one. It does acknowledge that Christian anti-Judaism (misinterpretations of the New Testament), a.k.a. the "teaching of contempt," did, over the centuries, result in negative attitudes toward and treatment of the Jews of Europe, such as the massacre of the Jews of the Rhineland in 1096, the expulsions of the Jews from England in the twelfth century and from Spain in 1492, forced ghettoization, the disciplinary decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council, blood libel charges, etc. These teachings and actions created a condition, which the pope has termed a "lulling of consciences" of Christians, such that many became easy prey for Hitlerian anti-Semitism in the twentieth century. Thus, Christian teaching is validly seen as one cause leading to the Holocaust.

Yet other factors were involved as well, such as the development of pseudo-scientific racism, economic scapegoating, etc. One needs to explain why genocide was not conceived until the twentieth century, after the church's political power in what had been "Christendom" was long broken, as well as why racial anti-Semitism flourished in some European countries more than in others, although the Christian teaching was virtually the same throughout the region.

One way of viewing the issue was put forward by the historian Yosef Yerushalmi some years ago. Christian anti-Judaism was one key factor, a "necessary cause" but not a "sufficient cause" of the Holocaust. In this view one can explain both the differences and the continuities between anti-Judaism and racial anti-Semitism. Such distinctions are vital if we are to develop sound educational materials on the Holocaust for future generations.

EUGENE J. FISHER
Washington, D.C.

The writer is associate director of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Pius XII & the Jews

I can find a lot to agree with in your editorial, "Misremembered." But I always come back to a nagging doubt when people say that Pius XII should have spoken openly against the Nazis. Fifty years later and thousands of miles away, that is easily said. For my part, I always remember my father's experience years ago. In the fifties and sixties, he made many business trips to New York City, often for meetings with Jewish businessmen. One of them, a Holocaust survivor, told my father, "Don't believe anyone who tells you the pope did not help the Jews. I would not be here if it weren't for the pope. He saved my life."

(REV.) ANTHONY DI RUSSO
North Walpole, N.H.

'The church as such'

The editorial "Misremembered" puts a finger on the central issue, the "church as such." Who is/are the church as such if not the people who have had leadership roles through the centuries, popes, bishops, and councils? And they are the ones who perpetuated the hostility toward Jews so unfortunately embedded in the New Testament. What is the church if not Saint John Chrysostom, the archetypical anti-Semite, if not the popes who preached the Crusades, if not the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 that set forth the medieval code for treatment of the Jews? There were always individuals who had sense enough to ignore these teachings. Were they the church?

As for Pius XII, of course he saved thousands of Jews. But where was the courage and moral leadership needed to condemn the enormities of the Holocaust? Are we simply to forget Cardinal Tisserant's warning in 1943 that Pius would merit the censure of history for his failure to speak out?

In 1974 I took a whole day in Rome to visit the Ardentine caves where the vic-

(Continued on page 28)

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Not an editorial

This space, usually reserved for vigorous opinion on politics, ecclesial and civil, will just this once be given over to saying something vigorous about the importance of editorial opinion and journals of opinion. Such magazines, *Commonweal* included, give voice—often contrary voice—to ideas, opinions, suspicions, and possibilities that a lot of people wish would just go away. (Complaints about our publishing Avery Dulles's broadside on the CTSA remind us just how annoyed some people can get; ditto, our efforts to argue that *no* position on Iraqi-U.S. relations could claim the moral high ground.) Editorials, columns, personal essays, criticism, reviews—contrary opinion and constructive criticism are crucial to the vitality of any society and all institutions: American politics as well as the Catholic church; the Congress as well as the president; Protestants, mainline and evangelical; Hollywood; Broadway; and yes, the CTSA and Saddam Hussein.

So too, journals of opinion need critical scrutiny, for it is motley crews that keep them going. For example, in a realm marked by radical underfunding, the new publisher of the *American Spectator*, Terry Eastland, has been embarrassed to find that $1.8 million was expended by the *Spectator*'s staff in digging up dirt about Bill Clinton. What a colossal waste of money! Presumably Eastland would agree as he makes the rounds of donors.

Time too takes its toll. Magazines "have a natural life span connected to the society in which they live," writes William Pfaff elsewhere in this issue (page 16). He laments the downward trajectory of the *New Yorker*, "a product of a certain America, parochial in its way, but very sure of itself, and sure of its identity, which by the 1980s, was dissolving under pressures of cultural ideology and social divisions."

Time and money: all magazines face these challenges, now heightened by easy access to the Internet and the Web (thank God, computers cannot be read in the bathtub, where real readers prefer magazines ten to one). Nonetheless, each of us—*Commonweal*, *America*, the *Christian Century*, the *New Republic*, the *Nation*, *First Things*, the *New York Review of Books*, *Sojourners*, etc.—must meet the challenges and continue the conversation that we carry on with our readers.

For our part, that has been a two-way conversation between Catholicism and American culture, which has gone on for over seven decades. As an independent journal edited by Roman Catholic lay people, *Commonweal* has never pretended to speak for the church, but only for ourselves and for the wide range of thinkers, Catholic and non-Catholic, who write for us. In the decades before Vatican II, when Catholicism remained officially ambivalent about the principle of church-state separation, it was necessary to defend the autonomy of the temporal realm and the role of the lay person's practical expertise in making the prudential judgments involved in the application of any religious conviction to very particular circumstances. Today, matters have shifted considerably in both church and culture, and yet that two-way conversation continues on different topics with different voices. The back and forth of that conversation, its very contrariness, helps sift through ideas good and bad, ferret out the sublime without overlooking the ridiculous, and distinguish the doable from the impossible (which perhaps should

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be undertaken anyway). All of this helps to construct and maintain a shared world view. This conversation is vital to how we understand the world, what we think, and the actions or inactions we finally carry out.

No surprise that such contraries make fluctuating fortunes the lot of all, even the well heeled. If magazines do have a natural life span, we hope it is a very long one; we're up for another seven decades. Our experience, we think, is proof that magazines can stay on message while reshaping that message to changing times, needs, and readers. New designs, new writers, new perspectives help—and sometimes too, new editors. James Wall of the *Christian Century* will retire soon as editor while continuing his column at the ecumenical weekly. He reports there are a number of good candidates ready and willing to succeed him. George Hunt, S.J., of *America* has announced his resignation (offering a typically deft and witty account of his requested departure while promising a tell-all memoir. We make two bets: He will soon have a book contract! The next editor will be Tom Reese, S.J.). Bravo to both Wall and Hunt for their long-running performances and for staying on message. Good luck, Tom.

All of this is to say that in our opinion, journals of opinion are the greatest idea since sliced whole wheat bread. Eat it. It's good for you. And your children.

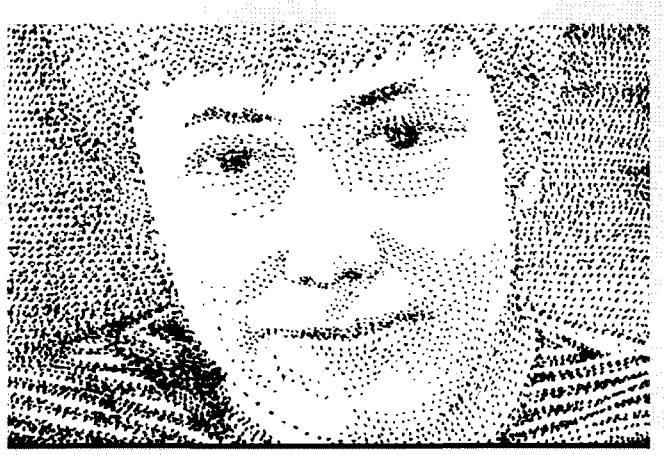
A fearless voice: Denise Levertov

As a poet, Denise Levertov, who died earlier this year at the age of seventy-four, actively sought knowledge and wisdom while trying to awaken a heightened consciousness of the rich, rewarding knowability of the world. A little poem, "Whisper," from her book *Evening Train* (New Directions, 1992) exemplifies her style.

Today the white mist that is weather
is mixed with the sallow tint
of the mist that is smog.
And from it, through it, breathes
a vast whisper:
the mountain.

Writing with a brevity and precision that suggest the haiku, Levertov demonstrated a wonderful command of the complexities of poetic form. Her metaphoric speech became shimmering with a musical incandescence. At its most sensual and most immediately physical, Levertov's poetry never failed to remind us that finally the reality most sought for is always mysterious, even when most palpable.

I met Denise Levertov about thirty years ago. She was giving an evening reading in San Francisco after spending the day at an anti-Vietnam War demonstration in Berkeley. She was a poet who boldly addressed the most difficult issues of spirituality and mystical experience, yet was also deeply involved in trying to stop the rankest and most unjust of wars. As a consequence, she became not only a major figure of post-sixties American literature, but a genuine hero of the civil rights, feminist, and antiwar movements.



At a time when the American people were being addressed by their leaders in Orwellian double-speak—when "pacification" meant that Asian peasants, young and old, were being turned into "body counts"—she wrote emphatically of the soul-shrinking horror of crimes perpetrated in our name. With Thoreau and his "Essay on Civil Disobedience" as her inspiration, Levertov did not hesitate to expose the truth that lay beyond the political corruption of the language. Coming on the heels of a poetic and critical tradition that expected its practitioners to be aloof from the affairs of the day, Levertov fearlessly turned her talent to those most pressing issues. And that fearlessness also encompassed the things of the heart, for Levertov wrote powerfully and beautifully of erotic love and the experience of passion.

Levertov's first published poem, "Listening to Distant Guns," was written when she was seventeen, about the time of the Dunkirk evacuation. In a wonderful but chilling understatement, she contrasts the compelling beauty of a day in Buckinghamshire with the pulsation of distant, heavy artillery, while imagining "the battle-scream." Her poems continued to reveal, in form as well as content, a world both beautiful and marred, and one always enriched by the poet's moral imagination. HAROLD ISBELL

Harold Isbell is the translator of Ovid: Heroides *(Penguin Books).*

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SIDNEY CALLAHAN

VISIONS & OTHER GIFTS

How can you tell if they are real?

What are we to make of modern religious visions and intense experiences—mine, yours, Mother Angelica's? Such episodes produce conflicts for me as an intellectual Christian believer and devotee of scientific psychology.

To get down to specifics, I'll take my own case. While intensely praying at Mass I often cry (surreptiously pretending to have a cold) and feel waves of joy, love, and peace well up. When I read that the disciples on the road to Emmaus recalled that their "hearts burned within them," I recognize the condition. Surely, too, those "consolations," and "the gift of tears" that Saint Ignatius writes about, must be similar sensations.

So far so good. I can intellectually comprehend that intense emotional arousal and imagery will produce bodily symptoms. More disturbing, however, have been several experiences of Jesus' actual presence while in private prayer. These moments took place decades ago in my youth, but I can still remember how intensely intimidating or awe-inspiring these perceptions were.

Even more puzzling was a visionary encounter with Mary who in a midlife health crisis calmed my desparate prayers by telling me that my lung disease (potentially fatal) was going to be all right. Mary did not seem to be as physically present to me as another human person in the room, but I beheld her image and felt the comfort of her message.

The next day when I went for a second lung x-ray I expected to be cured; but no, the ominous dark spots were still all over my lungs. Ah well, I thought, I must have been hallucinating, and tried to gather courage to undergo a surgical lung biopsy that might mean death at the age of forty.

Since I am now sixty-five I obviously didn't die. While I didn't have cancer my physicians and their consultants could never figure out what the mysterious "grit" all over my lungs could be. My outlook for the future was not great (you'll be an invalid for life), but in the next year's x-ray the grit had not spread and I'd taken up tennis and a regime of exercises. Then, surprise, surprise, the following year's x-ray revealed my lungs to be amazingly clear of whatever the infection had been.

A spontaneous remission of a stress-related parasitical infection? The fruit of will and exercise? And what of Mary? I've thought of the vision thing as a mini-miracle, a post-traumatic stress reaction, an intuitive read-out in imagery of the basically healthy state of my organism—or some combination of the above.

As a Christian and psychologist, however, I want to know more. Scientific psychology requires rigor, doubt, and a skeptical, testing attitude. Two great assaults upon the integrity of religious experience confront the skeptical inquirer. One reductive explanation is that human beings have been behaviorally conditioned to believe; the other is that our nonconscious mental processes create experiential phenomena that fulfill our wishes or needs.

I am always shaken by evidence that shows how much a human organism can be conditioned, with or without awareness. Stimuli, cues, and responses operate to shape both our internal and external behavior. Our autonomic nervous system, and maybe even the immune system, can be affected by subtle forms of reward and punishment. Human thoughts and verbal behavior can be conditioned; after all, cults and brainwashing programs have always operated on these principles. Internal assent to Maoist dogma increases if your inquisitors take away a painful punishment and thereby reward you each time you agree with them. Much to the chagrin of the police, people under interrogation confess to crimes they did not commit, and sometimes continue to believe their own made-up stories. Human beings can construct mental narratives that with the passage of time seem real. Ergo, people aren't necessarily lying or psychotic when they claim to remember being abducted by UFOs.

Then, too, unusual emotional states are not so rare. Hypnotic-trance behaviors and altered states of consciousness are part of the human repertoire and are found in many cultures. Spirit possessions of various kinds show up among normally functioning folk, and hallucinations do not always signal psychotic breakdowns. Human beings seem to be able to recreate dream states while awake—given enough stress, arousal, or emotional fervor.

When the brain/mind is chemically overdosed or deprived, or injured or diseased, other visions can appear. Many observers (including me) think near-death experiences are images produced in response to the brain's loss of oxygen coupled with cultural beliefs about heaven. In mania, probably caused by the brain's biochemical imbalance, persons often experience religious highs and

"I can't make you a blithe spirit.
I can only help you along the way to becoming one."

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grandiose delusions of special divine revelations. So why couldn't all these tricks of the mind and emotions apply to my religious experiences? Did I *really* see Mary? Do I really experience Christ and the Holy Spirit?

As I struggle to understand these things, I try to obtain some coherence in my belief system. To me it looks virtually certain that God has created a freely operating natural world of independent secondary causes open to rigorous scientific inquiry and discovery. But at the same time this world and the people in it live and move and have their being in God. The universe as we know it must be completely natural and completely God-saturated at the same time.

This interpenetration of the divine and natural can be realized or sensed by some persons more than others, but religious experience seems intrinsic and natural to the human species—just as language is. Only secularized modern types achieve religious tone-deafness and thereby manage to confine their intense experiences to sex, violence, art, or creative work.

So when you or I or mystics or little ladies in Bayside have visions of Mary or religious consolations, we are doing what comes naturally. Our only problem is to discern the quality of these normally occurring experiences of what William James called the "More." Sound is all around us in the air but all radio antennae are not equally, or as accurately, tuned. Some signals are mixed, or merely chaotic noise; other static is a sign that the vacuum tube is burning out.

The newest version of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*, published by the American Psychiatric Association, distinguishes betweeen mental disorders and manifestations of religious and spiritual problems (what some have called "spiritual emergencies"). In the *DSM-IV* some religious problems can be diagnosed as overlapping with mental disorders, but the two categories are not the same.

Prudential judgments are required in the psychiatric practice of differential diagnosis, just as they are in the traditional practice of discernment of spirits. What is the meaning of a particular religious experience and by what criteria do we judge it? The spiritual traditon insists that "by their fruits you shall know them." If consolations (or visions) help you to be more loving and just, much less heal your disease, then be grateful to accept the lift from the rising tide. I end up trusting my religious experiences because they have buoyed me up and helped me to love and endure.

But if the tide begins to ebb and we grow numb and cold, let's not blame God. Mild depressions and decaying brain synapses are marks of our fallen world. Better to hunker down and plod on in hope. God's largesse will eventually bring renewals of youthful joy and more than a glimpse of heaven. □

Kelly Candaele & Peter Dreier

UNION DESTRUCTION ACT

California's Proposition 226

Remember 1958! That's the rallying cry of organized labor in California as it approaches a June 2 primary election that could determine the union movement's political future, not only in California but elsewhere. Labor will focus most of its political energies on defeating Proposition 226, dubbed by proponents the "Paycheck Protection Act," enactment of which would require that unions gain yearly permission from their members to spend members' dues in political campaigns.

On the surface, the Paycheck Protection Act has an obvious appeal. Why shouldn't members be able to decide whether unions can use their dues for political purposes? The reality is that the typical union member contributes about $20 a year that goes for political purposes. That amount offers an individual little in the way of political influence, but wielded collectively, these funds make organized labor a significant player in politics. In 1992, a similar measure restricting unions passed in Washington state. Since then, political contributions to state AFL-CIO unions have declined by 40 percent, and in 1994, conservatives took control of the state legislature.

California's Proposition 226 is a model of hypocrisy. It would not require corporations to get shareholders' permission before making corporate campaign contributions or lobbying for specific bills—business interests already outspend labor by ten to one in state races, not including corporate-dominated "soft" money—but it would make it nearly impossible for unions to raise substantial funds for political purposes such as TV ads, direct mail, and get-out-the-vote efforts. Thus, Proposition 226 is aimed at the heart of the progressive coalition. Why? Two years ago, the state's unions played a key role in California's legistlative races. Labor mobilized members in an unprecedented grassroots effort and helped restore thin Democratic majorities in both houses.

For Republicans, Proposition 226 is more than a vehicle to undercut union influence. They view Proposition 226 as a linchpin of their long-term strategy, for without labor's political influence, Democrats will be hard-pressed to maintain their control of the California legislature, or elect a Democrat governor this fall. Furthermore, whatever party has control of California politics will oversee the next congressional reapportionment following the 2000 census. For the national GOP, orchestrating the redistricting of California's likely fifty-five congressional seats is a prerequisite to controlling the House.

Not since 1958 has labor's institutional strength come under such a direct attack. In the mid-1950s, labor had reached the pinnacle of its size and economic clout nationally, representing over one-third of American workers. Corporate America counterattacked with so-called "Right-to-Work"

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initiatives, which it helped place on the ballot in six states. The initiatives, which sought to allow employees to benefit from the gains of union contracts—health benefits, shorter work hours, increased wages—but without having to pay dues or even join the union, were designed to put unions out of business.

The most visible battle over "Right-to-Work" laws took place in California in 1958. Unions went to unprecedented lengths to defeat the measure. Early on in the campaign, polls showed that the average voter was in favor of the concept of the right to work, a phrase that was as vague as it was politically clever. To shift the tide, the state AFL-CIO raised additional funds from its members. It worked with civic, religious, and community leaders to form a "Citizens Committee against Right-to-Work," which directed a well-crafted message to the nonunion public, linking labor's fate with the preservation of Social Security, increasing the minimum wage, and fighting for public education.

Conservative forces in California were represented by U.S. Senator William Knowland, the former publisher of the *Oakland Tribune* and the Republican nominee for governor. Knowland made "Right-to-Work" a dominant theme throughout the gubernatorial campaign, telling anyone who would listen that the real issue was "union democracy." His Democrat opponent, Attorney General Edmund G. "Pat" Brown, argued that "Right-to-Work" diverted voters from the real challenges facing California. Brown won and "Right-to-Work" lost by a two-to-one margin.

As with the battle of 1958, the conflict over Proposition 226 is reverberating in this year's governor's race. Attorney General Dan Lungren, the Republican candidate, has announced his support while all three of the Democratic primary candidates have stated their opposition. But unlike 1958, the current Democrats are unlikely to campaign hard against 226, at least until polls indicate that to do so would be a vote-getter.

But there are other parallels between 1958 and today, particularly on the national level. Throughout 1957 and early 1958, Senator John McClellan (D-Ark.) held hearings into union corruption and mob influence, attracting widespread national attention. His committee concluded that millions of dollars of union funds had been embezzled, and that violence was rife in some unions.

Today, as the labor movement seeks to rebuild after decades of decline, its opponents are again mounting a counter-offensive. Although AFL-CIO President John Sweeney, elected two years ago as an activist reformer, has pledged a new era of grassroots organizing, his efforts have been partly thwarted by a new wave of allegations of union corruption, and by a Republican national political agenda designed to throttle labor's political comeback. Congressman Peter Hoekstra (R-Mich.) has held hearings into the allegations of election fraud in the 1996 Teamsters election, and has issued subpoenas to other unions and to the Democratic National Committee. The hearings are likely to heat up again to coincide with the election cycle. And Republican House and Senate leaders Newt Gingrich and Trent Lott have pledged to kill any campaign finance reform law that does not include restrictions on union political contributions (the federal level "Paycheck Protection Act," on which Proposition 226 is modeled).

California is not the first test case for initiatives designed to restrict labor's political power. In fact, currently there is similar legislative activity ongoing in every state. But as in 1958, California is the crucial battleground. When "Right-to-Work" was defeated there, it was a major setback in the "open shop" march across the country.

Unions have an uphill battle in California. A statewide Field Poll taken in March found that 60 percent of registered voters—including the same percentage of union members—favored Proposition 226. Still, the anti-226 forces have some advantages. First, when voters are confused about what an initiative means, historically they tend to vote no. Since 1911, two-thirds of statewide initiatives in California have gone down to defeat. Second, the "no" forces will draw attention to Proposition 226's major backers, including J. Patrick Rooney—CEO of Golden Rule Insurance Company of Indiana and one of Newt Gingrich's strongest allies—and Grover Norquist of the right-wing Americans for Tax Reform. So far, major California business leaders have remained on the sidelines; although not pro-union, many are uncomfortable being in the company of what they consider the right-wing fringe. It remains to be seen whether outgoing Governor Pete Wilson, chairperson of the Proposition 226 Campaign Committee, can bring the business community on board.

The fight for Proposition 226 will be won or lost on television, where most voters get their information. The California State AFL-CIO estimates it will take $10 million to run an effective media campaign. But that will not be enough. Labor will also have to mount an aggressive grassroots effort that reaches beyond its own members. Weaker politically and numerically than in 1958, labor needs to broaden its support beyond its membership and persuade enough voters that the defeat of 226 is key in protecting their standard of living. For if Proposition 226 passes, environmentalists, senior citizens, advocates for children and the disabled, supporters of affordable housing, civil rights, and women's rights groups—as well as champions of public schools and higher education—will all find themselves much weaker politically. More than any other liberal group, organized labor has the resources of money and members to help elect candidates generally sympathetic to progressive causes. While unions have been reaching out to find these new allies, unlike forty years ago, so far high-profile figures—clergy, education leaders, civil rights activists, civic leaders, and others—have not played a significant role in the fight against Proposition 226. With so much at stake, labor has to convince others that they too are fighting for their lives. □

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Edward McGlynn Gaffney

NORTHERN IRELAND

A vote for peace

The partition of Ireland stems from the Treaty of 1922, in which England agreed to withdraw from Dublin and the twenty-six counties that now form the Republic of Ireland, and created the entity of Northern Ireland from the six counties in the province of Ulster. Since then, both sides in Northern Ireland—Unionists seeking to remain within the United Kingdom and Nationalists aspiring to national unity with the Republic—have thought of themselves as beleaguered minorities. Unionists form a majority in the North, but only a small percentage of the total population of the island, and have been wary of being abandoned by London to a "foreign" government in Dublin, where they fear that the distinctive character of their community will be swallowed up by the majority. Nationalists form a minority within Northern Ireland, have suffered injuries to their civil rights (voting, employment, housing) at the hands of the Unionists, and yearn for a more representative democracy that they identify with the Republic. Both communities can articulate a list of grievances as long as an arm, and the tenacious clinging to memories of past injuries has impeded a resolution of "the Troubles."

This picture will change if voters in Ireland and Northern Ireland on May 22 ratify a complex power-sharing arrangement that was struck on Good Friday when weary negotiators produced a historic agreement that demands much from all parties. Under this proposal, the Republic would renounce any claim on unifying the island, unless a majority in Northern Ireland desired that. Irish men and women on both sides are now challenged to think of new forms of civil order that transcend national identity while acknowledging the character of local communities. Under the agreement, a new power-sharing assembly in Northern Ireland would be elected according to proportional representation (thus ending the injustice of gerrymanders). Along with a cabinet that would also reflect the diversity of the electorate, this new body would absorb some of the governmental responsibilities now exercised in London. The agreement also establishes a Council in which ministers and legislators from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland would work together on issues of joint concern, such as the environment, tourism, and transportation. A new body, the Council of the Isles, in which representatives from the parliaments of Britain and Ireland (and from the proposed assemblies of Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales), would meet twice annually to discuss matters of mutual concern.

The biggest payoff from this agreement is that it promises a way out of the slaughter that has scarred Northern Ireland for nearly three decades. From 1969 to the present, partisan military and paramilitary violence has claimed 3,248 lives. John Hume, leader of the Social and Democratic Labour Party (SDLP), has consistently urged peaceful democratic negotiation as the only acceptable path toward the future. Noting that the problems of the 1920s—territory and imperialism—are no longer those of an interdependent "new Europe, in which sovereignty has changed its meaning," Hume stated that the challenge of today is "to replace bitter conflict and tension with cooperation and partnership." He supports ratification.

So does Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams, who is more vulnerable than Hume to bitter disappointment within the ranks of the Irish Republican Army. At the time of the unilateral cease-fire by the IRA in August 1994, Adams pledged his "firm intention to see the gun removed permanently from Irish politics." As goal posts kept shifting and talks were delayed, the command of the IRA grew disillusioned and ordered the Canary Wharf bombing in East London in February 1996. This signaled an end to the cease-fire. After the Labour Party's victory in May 1997, Mo Mowlan, Secretary for Northern Ireland in the British Cabinet, signaled to Adams that Sinn Féin would be admitted to all-party negotiations within six weeks after a genuine cease-fire. With some off-again, on-again stops and starts, Adams was admitted to the talks. He proved a shrewd participant, committed to the political process.

David Trimble, leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, is also urging ratification. Trimble emerged with a settlement that retains the Act of Union but which moves toward a form of power-sharing that could provide the right formula for peace at this moment. He has distanced himself from Ian Paisley, leader of the Democratic Unionist Party, who was unwilling to participate in the negotiations because Sinn Féin was at the table. Paisley is opposed to ratification, but no longer commands the kind of galvanized loyalty that enabled him to topple the attempt at power-sharing in the early 1970s.

The SDLP has always been opposed to violence. Both sides of the paramilitary armed camps must now make good on the promises to renounce warfare. President Bill Clinton, who has done more in the past year to advance the cause of peace in Ireland than any other president, offered American assistance on this issue at a crucial moment in the last hours of negotiations being conducted by former U.S. Senator George Mitchell, when a lack of consensus on decommissioning of arms threatened to block agreement. Ireland now has an opportunity to forge not a national unity, but a unity at a more profoundly human level. As Hume puts it, "If we contrast the gloomy prospect of twenty-five years of armed struggle to the vision of twenty-five years of committed peaceful and organized activity, harnessing all the energies of our people to face up to our problems, should there be any doubt about our choices for the next generation?" □

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CLERICAL CHARACTER(S)

Rereading J.F. Powers

J.V. Long

In the mid 1960s, I finished parochial school in a newly constructed, handsomely maintained suburban parish in upstate New York. The pastor had two assistants, and at least eight or nine Sisters of Mercy staffed the school. One summer evening, the parish honored the senior of the two assistants, who'd been reassigned, with a farewell party and a color TV. His replacement was a much older priest. Under his breath, in the back of the room, the youngest assistant, who served the parish until he had a nervous breakdown, described his new colleague as the diocese's "Dean of Curates." I tried to be appropriately impressed by the title. He said, "It's not an honor."

Re-reading J.F. Powers's short stories and novels has evoked these memories, and others just as vivid. Reading Powers today is like visiting an archaeological site. The dialectic between his texts and my memory has excavated the truth in each and brought back to mind a comfortable world of unquestioned assumptions. These assumptions are now leavened, thanks to Powers's fiction, with an awareness of apparently innocuous venalities that masked surprising dangers.

Because he has published relatively little and concentrated so sharply on a very narrow kind of human experience, it is fair to wonder how long J.F. Powers's work will continue to be appreciated. Moreover, in responding to it now, is it possible to avoid sounding elegiac? And can one respond to Powers's work personally without nostalgia?

Powers's niche in contemporary letters is so singular that most responses to his work will necessarily be idiosyncratic. Though there are short stories—like "The Old Bird, A Love Story," from his first collection (1951) and "Tinkers" from his last (1975)—centered on the disappointments and intricacies of family life, Powers mainly writes about priests. Flannery O'Connor's observation is acute (and made before the first of his two novels, *Morte D'Urban*, was published): "Powers's stories can be divided into two kinds—those that deal with the Catholic clergy and those that don't. Those that deal with the clergy are as good as any stories being written by anybody; those that don't are not so good."

Powers's fiction is not apologetic; it's about character. The characters happen, more often than not, to be priests. His prose is lapidary, and his irony is cool and pervasive as this sample from an early story, "The Forks," demonstrates: "Monsignor proceeded at a precise pace to the back door of the rectory. There he held the screen open momentarily, as if remembering something or reluctant to enter before himself—such was his humility." J.F. Powers will always be significant to readers who value and learn from good writing. No elegies are required on that score.

In 1963, the year *Morte D'Urban* received the National Book Award, *Commonweal* published a short symposium on "The Catholic as Writer" to which Wilfrid Sheed and Michael Novak contributed. Sheed discusses the complexities that burden the "Catholic" writer concerned with conveying truth in narrative since, "besides telling his story right, he has to worry about giving the right impression about Catholic doctrine." Novak's elegant essay looks beyond the (then) current fixation with priests ("all our Catholic imaginations seem dominated by the priests") to the creation of "prophetical" novels that "expose the ideas and patterns of emotion by which men do or should live." Both contributors mention Powers; he was a solid, established, talented writer. Midcentury American Catholics had a voice.

However, midcentury American Catholicism has long since passed away. *Our* narrative—that is, the story we compose for ourselves about our origins, about who we are and what we believe in and yearn for—has obviously ruptured. Some of the issues that concerned Wilfrid Sheed in 1963, divorce

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and marital fidelity, for example, now seem almost poignant. Choices that were unnamed, if not unimagined, thirty years ago are confronted today. However regrettable it may be to some, the moral truths fiction now encompass denote a world of expectation and desire and grace that is broader than the problems revolving around the heterosexual marriage bed. Nonetheless, Michael Novak's diagnosis is still apposite: "The problem of the novelist is to discover the ways of grace in order to be able to contrive their likeness in a work of art."

J.V. Long's critical essay on J.F. Powers is another in our series of articles on contemporary Catholic writers of fiction. We have asked our essayists to give an overview of the author's work, showing our readers where and how this writer locates the central human drama, the big questions, the religious crisis of our time. What does the Catholic sensibility of J.F. Powers tell us about our common world, about the state of our souls? The most recently published article in the series was written by Suzanne Keen on Seamus Heaney (May 17, 1996).

We live in a breech. The absence of certainty, of definition, of cultural security—whose substance Powers's Catholics depended upon in the 1950s—is our predicament. The cheap certainties are irrecoverable, and only the truly fearful would mistake them for real ballast. Cardinal Joseph Bernardin's confident observations, in an interview published in the *New York Times* after his death, give end-of-the-century American Catholics another kind of voice. "The essential elements of the church have been the same for the last 2,000 years. But the way we go about the ministry of the church has changed enormously. After we've gone through this phase, we will begin to see good things. But it's going to be different. If you think that to go in the right direction we have to bring back the good old days, that's not going to happen."

Powers's clerics and parishioners in many respects have been overtaken by events. Their deepest confusions and aspirations, however, have survived the cold war. The particulars of observance (does anyone still wear a biretta?) have been supplanted. The mystique of the priesthood has certainly been shattered. And the current dynamic of life in many parishes could hardly have been predicted. Nonetheless, men and women, ordained and not, are still susceptible to "the ways of grace," and Powers's take on that encounter is anything but parochial.

Catholics of a certain age, over forty, say, have seen the priesthood transformed during their lifetimes. The transformation, though necessary, has not been particularly edifying. Powers's narratives are rooted in a world where priests are encapsulated by an aura that intentionally separates them from most conventional varieties of social intercourse. Novak's point, in 1963, was obvious. "Beyond what the sacrament of Holy Orders makes legitimate, the Catholic priest receives an extraordinary degree of veneration from his people. Since he confects the Eucharist—'holds God in his hands'—in Christ's name, but by his own judgment absolves sins, and lives that extraordinary life, the life of voluntary celibacy, the priest has a great hold on the imagination of his people. They are habituated to his broadened authority." Notwithstanding, what seemed to be a privilege carried high hidden costs. Powers's stories subvert the mystique by showing—often comically—that the lure of temptation is no easier to resist if one wears a Roman collar.

Powers's priests operate in an enclosed world that isolates them more completely than any monastic cloister. Their isolation makes them particularly vulnerable to the "wickedness and snares of the devil," as the prayer to Saint Michael, recited at the end of every Mass, went. Powers's heartfelt and heartbreaking accounts of human traffic with the devil will outlast current fashions in liturgy or theology. He identifies the Culprit (his first collection of short stories was called *Prince of Darkness*) and thereby confronts our narcissistic, quasi-gnostic, guilt-free sensibilities. Furthermore, he limns the mysterious source of consolation that sustains us—his second collection of stories was called *The Presence of Grace*.

The two novels, *Morte D'Urban* and *Wheat that Springeth Green*, are Powers's major achievements and demonstrate the difficulties of negotiating with the devil. Neither Father Urban Roche nor Father Joe Hackett is a great, or even an interesting, sinner. Both are ambitious, lonely, manipulative (in Urban's case), and alcoholic (in Hackett's) bachelors. Their faults are utterly pedestrian, and Powers makes us see that evil doesn't need to be overwhelming in order to be lethal. These priests are not blessed with heroic sanctity, yet the grace of redemption they find emerges from the same mysteries that consoled the martyrs and mystics whose struggles involved more drama.

In *Morte D'Urban*, Urban's energy, resourcefulness, and contacts seem to be the only distinction owned by the fictitious, unambiguously second-rate Order of Saint Clement. "The Clementines were unique in that they were noted for nothing at all." Urban's assignment was the mission band. He stumped the Midwest, like any other traveling salesman, looking to score the main chance. "Not running off the mouth at every opportunity, but knowing when to cast one's pearls, and how—that, in the best sense of the word was priestcraft." Urban practices his craft relentlessly. An operator whose performance is burnished by every choice he makes, Urban, I think, is burdened by the noonday devil. A French theorist of an earlier generation, John Cassian (in Helen Waddell's wonderful collection, *The Desert Fathers*, he's called Cassian of Marseilles), has the symptoms of Urban's spiri-

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tual boredom nailed down: "Finally our malady suggests that in common courtesy one should salute the brethren, and visit the sick, near or far . . . or there is that religious and devout lady, destitute of any support from her family, whom it is a pious act to visit now and then and supply in holy wise with necessary comforts, neglected and despised as she is by her own relations."

When he is transferred to the order's latest white elephant, Saint Clement's Hill, a decrepit retreat house in remote Minnesota, Urban is concerned that he has alienated Billy Cosgrove, the benefactor he has most recently cultivated to take an interest in the order's affairs. However, before long, Urban is able to circumvent what he perceives to be the intentions of lesser men—his superiors—and is making the most of all the opportunities available in his new territory. One night he speaks at the "Poinsettia Smorgasbord, held in the Greenwich Village Room of the General Diggles Hotel" and is saluted afterward by "one man saying that, though he was not a Catholic himself, he had always regarded Catholicism as one of the world's top religions and had never felt closer to it than he had that evening."

As he has with every assignment, Urban makes Minnesota a personal triumph. Even Cosgrove remains loyally on the hook. Urban has undeniable star quality, which he would never exercise except in the interests of the church and his order. And it bears fruit. "To the Hill had come a number of those better types who had never made a retreat before and whose support—and not just material support—was required if the place was to succeed as a spiritual powerhouse or oasis (Father Urban used both terms), although the less desirable types were still in the majority."

Ever the dreamer, Urban arranges a real estate deal with Cosgrove's backing and the local bishop's approval that allows him to build a golf course (in order to redress the imbalance between the more and less desirable) next to the Hill. Urban's success seems to be a mixed blessing when the bishop begins eyeing the Hill and its amenities as a possible site for a new seminary. Nerves are taut in a round of golf with the bishop and his protégé, "Father Feld [whom Urban fears] would be just the man to head a seminary. 'He's been over in Europe for three or four years. Louvain. He's fit for nothing else, now.'" However, when Urban is knocked unconscious on the final green by the bishop's ball, his excellency immediately becomes less proprietary.

In consequence of his injury, Urban's visions slowly take a decidedly unfamiliar turn; he recuperates without recovering his zest. A disastrous hunting outing with Cosgrove, whose spoiled petulance and cruelty are finally turned on Urban, appears to jeopardize all that Urban has been trying to build.

Urban is unused to failure. He can no longer flee from the demon who pursues him, and his new conflict is interior. Thus disposed, Urban is elected provincial of the Clementine's Chicago Province by a constituency that expects to be dazzled by the old magic, that expects to be relieved of "the curse of mediocrity." To describe their hopes as disappointed is to understate the result. Urban, who suffers incapacitating headaches, becomes passive. "Thus he tried to disguise his condition from others, and thus, without wishing to, he gained a reputation for piety he hadn't had before, which, however, was not entirely unwarranted now." The knock to Urban's head initiates the intrusion of grace. His surrender to its claims costs him his health and reputation. Having lived a life of aggressive friendliness but no intimacy, he now has to face God in silence and alone. In Powers's hands, a reader feels that Urban is prepared for the encounter.

The clergymen who occupy Powers's rectories and chancery offices are torn between serving God or Management. The church operates confidently on the corporate model, and the middle managers—pastors and their assistants—who learn how to work the system efficiently are amply rewarded. Ambition is the sublimation of choice, and it is easy to provoke suspicion. Human nature remains impervious to the changes in the church's structures that Powers chronicles from his earliest stories through his last novel. The humble Monsignor in "Forks" bears his curate like a cross. "He found Father Eudex reading the *Catholic Worker* one day and had not trusted him since. Father Eudex's conception of the priesthood was evangelical in the worst sense, barbaric, gross, foreign to the mind of the church, which was one of two terms he used as sticks to beat him with. The other was taste. The air of the rectory was often heavy with The Mind of the Church and Taste."

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Throughout all of Powers's work, the evangelical counsels compete with the demands of the American Century. In "The Devil Was the Joker," included in *The Presence of Grace*, Myles Flynn, a hapless ex-seminarian still hoping somehow to be ordained, becomes an assistant to a huckster who sells religious goods and promises Myles an introduction to a sympathetic bishop ("a bishop was more necessary than a vocation"). Alas, Myles has a dream of the priesthood that is unlikely to be realized in any Midwestern rectory. "Not a punch-drunk seminary professor or a fat cat in a million-dollar parish . . . but a simple shepherd ministering gently to the poorest of God's poor. He wouldn't mind being a priest-worker, like those already functioning so successfully in France, according to reports reaching him. 'That can't happen here,' Mac [the religious supplies entrepreneur] said. Myles, however, saw difficult times ahead for the nation . . . there would soon be priest-workers slaving away in fields and factories by day and tending to the spiritual needs of their poor fellow-workers by night. 'Poor?' Mac asked. 'What about the unions? When I think what those boys take home!'"

Books discussed in this essay

Prince of Darkness and Other Stories
Doubleday, 1951

The Presence of Grace
Atheneum, 1962

Morte D'Urban
Modern Library, 1966

Look How the Fish Live
Knopf, 1975

Wheat that Springeth Green
Knopf, 1988

Father Joe Hackett, the protagonist of *Wheat that Springeth Green*, tries to withstand the turmoil engendered in the church by Vatican II and in the world by the 1960s—most of the novel takes place in 1968. After dabbling with ascetical rigors and mysticism during his seminary days, his first assignment is to Holy Faith Parish, whose pastor, Father Van Slaag, is reputed to be the diocese's only true contemplative. Faced with the real thing, Hackett abandons his mystical inclinations and throws himself into the work for which he has both the aptitude and the will. "But the best times for Joe were those times when he could be of real use to people as a priest—those times of trial, tragedy, and ordinary death—into which he entered deeper than he had before. 'After years of trying to walk on the water, you know . . . it's good to come ashore and feel the warm sand between my toes.'"

Hackett turns his vocation into a career. "His vices, his eating and drinking, did tend to silence the prophet in him, but so did common sense." After Holy Faith and a number of years running Diocesan Catholic Charities, he gets a parish of his own. With no other real attachments in his life, he invests his emotions heavily in the activity of running an organization and treasures the successes he achieves as an efficient manager. "As for feeling thwarted and useless, he knew that feeling, but he also knew what it meant. It meant that he was in touch with reality, and that was something these days."

Besides poker with a fast set of fellow priests and his dependence on drink, nothing much intrudes on Hackett's solitude. Even the assignment of a curate to his parish is perceived as an fulfillment of the system's perduring success: He will now have a younger priest to initiate into the thorny joys of priestly fellowship. However, Hackett is unable to maintain control of either his assistant's attitudes or his choice of friends and inevitably succumbs to the demands of human responsibility: he finds a friend in the young priest rather than a pupil.

Historical realities impinge on Hackett's pastoral behavior as well. When a particularly hawkish parishioner's son chooses to flee to Canada rather than serve in Vietnam, Hackett supports the decision. He lives in a vortex that includes the rapid changes in the Catholic church as well as the apparent unraveling of civil society. In the midst of the chaos, he discovers real asceticism. Hackett's earliest inclinations, if somewhat hysterically indulged as a seminarian, were sound and had merely remained dormant. At a propitious moment of minor crisis in the parish, "one of those times when the wise pastor takes off for a week or two, in the hope of absence making the heart grow fonder," Joe travels to Montreal. He stays in the Catholic Worker house where his draft-dodging former parishioner has found a home-in-exile. For a short, transforming time, Joe Hackett behaves like a simple, sober priest.

The depth of his transformation, perhaps it is better to call it his conversion, is symbolically reinforced by the move he engineers when he returns home. He asks the archbishop for a new assignment—to Holy Cross, a languishing inner-city parish with no status and no curate. The name is obviously deliberate: Hackett is able to embrace the cross after his own purgation, after he's been stripped of the images that made up his notion of what it means to be a priest. Hackett had created an idol that held him in thrall until, late in his career, by looking at faces and the needs behind them one at a time, he recovered his vocation.

To date, Hackett's story is Powers's last word on the vagaries of service and the costs of sacrifice. Yet a great deal has happened in the church and in the country since 1968. (Jesse Jackson referred to 1993 as the twenty-fifth anniversary of everything.) Is it nostalgic to wonder whether it was easier once to knit together one's identity as a citizen and a believer? Moreover, what does it mean to be a Catholic in America if our suspicions of the *pontifex maximus* are as profound as our distrust of the prevailing cant of those building bridges to the twenty-first century? Perhaps we've lost everything but the questions and must rely, like Father Hackett, on the turbulent consolation of the cross.

Looking for God is treacherous, perhaps especially so for those who seem to have a professional stake in the enterprise. However, J.F. Powers's work reminds us that grace is never as remote as the devil would have us believe. □

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Celia Wren

EVERYONE'S A CRITIC

'Saint Nicholas' & 'Art'

"It is hard, it is hard indeed," a bored theater critic intones in Tom Stoppard's comic masterpiece *The Real Inspector Hound*, "and therefore I will not attempt, to refrain from invoking the names of Kafka, Sartre, Shakespeare, Saint Paul, Beckett, Birkett, Pinero, Pirandello, Dante, and Dorothy L. Sayers." Shortly after firing this salvo of allusions at the derivative potboiler he is watching, the reviewer finds himself swept helplessly across the footlights, to his doom. Criticizing art is a dangerous business.

Three decades after Stoppard sentenced his critic to death by drama, two delightful new plays from across the Atlantic have picked up on the theme of aesthetic peril. Yasmina Reza's *Art* is cerebral and tightly woven, an inspired construct of ideas and banter; Conor McPherson's leisurely and enigmatic *Saint Nicholas* develops organically around a few evocative images. But both works comment incisively on the experience of being a critic—not a professional phrasemonger, necessarily, but anyone who wields an artistic opinion in the face of a hostile or indifferent world.

The protagonist of the one-man play *Saint Nicholas* is, in fact, a theater critic, a world-weary alcoholic whose enthusiasm for show business is less substantial than the foam on his beer. After years of churning out withering commentaries, this decaying Dublin hack (Brian Cox) feels both torment and relief when a play—or, more accurately, a player—finally makes an impression. Smitten with an actress in a mediocre production, he forsakes career and family, follows the lady to London, and, as one might expect, falls in with a crowd of...vampires.

Wait a minute! From a character study anchored in Dublin's theater district, whence the inexplicable detour through Anne Rice territory? Up-and-coming Irish playwright McPherson has acknowledged that the idea for *Saint Nicholas* came to him in a dream; not surprisingly, the monologue merges incommensurates with oneiric nonchalance. Lovers of form will scorn the work for its dreamlike shapelessness. But lopsided stories can have more charm — and even, in a way, more solidity — than narratives with Tiffany contours. Perfect shape smacks of insincerity, while a straggling plot invites belief, since it can have no other justification but truth.

And if any actor can tempt us to swallow McPherson's concept, it is Cox, a craggy, mesmerizing actor whose voice is so thrilling he could transfix listeners by reciting the ingredients on an aspirin bottle. (He was recently sighted in the films *The Boxer* and *Desperate Measures*.) Savoring the lines, delivering phrases with idiosyncratic but perfectly chosen shifts in speed, Cox dared the audience to doubt he was the wayward Dublin critic. Apart from a few chairs and milkcrates, the production (directed by McPherson) boasted no set, but the actor moved as if a tangible past surrounded him: a bar packed with wary actors, or dawn-struck vampires melting from a garden littered with bodies.

Cox has a supremely confident stage presence: at one press preview, he delivered a minute or two of the monologue while perched calmly on the armrest of a scribbling reviewer. The artistic authority he exuded underscored one theme linking *Saint Nicholas*'s vampires to its thespians: the relationship between opinion and power.

Professional critics are vampires, the play suggests: they prey on creativity, and grow stronger by sapping artists' strength. Never self-sufficient, they revel in their ability to instill fear. McPherson even hints at how easy it is for critical pedantry to eclipse real understanding: a surefire way to escape vampires, it turns out, is to fling a few handfuls of rice at them. Compulsive connoisseurs of detail, the vampires (critics) will be glued to the spot, oblivious to the broader landscape, until they have counted every last grain.

Aesthetic verdicts wreak yet more havoc in *Art*, the brilliant comedy by French playwright Reza. Launched on the road to international success when Sean Connery's wife saw it in Paris in 1995, *Art* was recently a hit in London under the direction of Matthew Warchus, who is also responsible for the stylish, perfectly paced New York production. (The English translation is by playwright/screenwriter/director Christopher Hampton.)

It is hard to know which aspect of *Art* to admire more: the concept, or the ex-

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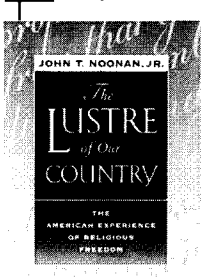

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ecution. Reza has balanced ninety minutes of human and intellectual insight onto a witty premise: three men—devoted friends for years—find their relationship crumbling after one of them buys a white-on-white painting. The brooding Serge (Victor Garber) thinks the painting is brilliant. The irascible Marc (Alan Alda) thinks it is a joke. Yvan (Alfred Molina), always a moderate, comes down in the middle, to the fury of the other two. As the trio lurches ever closer to violence, the canvas becomes a window onto aesthetic, linguistic, and emotional abysses.

Capitalizing masterfully upon this conceit, Reza probes the ambiguities of art and affection in scenes that are taut, ingeniously structured, and often hilarious. Profundities skim by like ping pong balls. Does an art work have inherent value, or is value created by the market, or the era—or by a spectator's caprice? Is there such a thing as disinterested friendship? How about absolute truth? Are modern artists trying to pull one over on us? And is there any delicate way of disposing of olive pits?

Reza gauges the temperaments of her characters with a surgeon's precision, and the script's ever-changing currents of anger, resentment, and sympathy create astonishing suspense in a play that is basically one long discussion. The dialogue has the paradoxical versatility of an optical illusion: Serge, Marc, and Yvan criticize each other by criticizing art, and each betrays himself when attacking the other guy. And their quibbles over words and concepts (Is it the white in the painting, or the *idea* of whiteness, that is so upsetting?) could admit them to a deconstructionists' convention.

From the opening moments, when Alda peers at Serge's painting, tilts his head, takes off his glasses, steps back, and peers again, expertly-tuned performances by the three stars keep the intellectual debate churning beneath histrionics and deadpan comedy. Indeed, the production is a testament to the way set, lighting, costume, acting, and direction can work together to turn a script to best account.

Mark Thompson's stylized design gives the visual composition a tinge of antinaturalism. The set's stark, unnaturally high walls, dwarfing the actors, flavor the scenes with absurdism reminiscent of a *New Yorker* cartoon. Three contrasting chairs—one hyper-modern, one antique, and one somewhere in-between—serve as both furniture and symbol. (This set represents the apartment of each of the three friends in turn, with alterations of lighting and the substitution of a single painting making it echo the personality of each man.) Even the actors' matching costumes—blue shirts and ties beneath black suits, for example — subtly undermine the realism.

As Serge, Marc, and Yvan sputter over the tenets of art, the production calls attention to the fact that they themselves are fabrications. Think twice before announcing your critiques, it seems to warn the audience: you may yourselves embellish some tableau whose features you cannot perceive. □

MEDIA

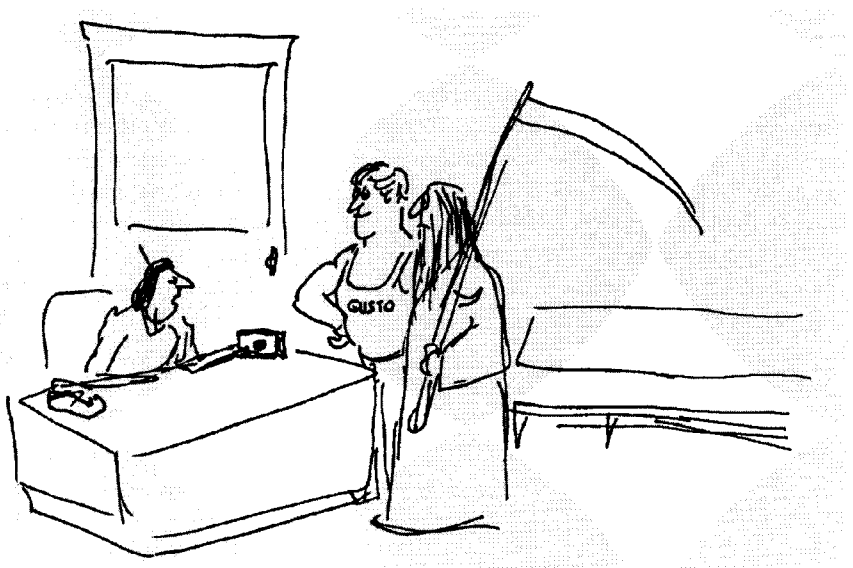
William Pfaff

A LAPSE IN TASTE

Tina Brown's 'New Yorker'

It is unseemly to take pleasure in the failures of others, but there is reason to do so in the news that the *New Yorker* magazine of Tina Brown and S.I. Newhouse, Jr., is a failure. It has been losing money ever since Newhouse bought the magazine thirteen years ago, and now it is to be folded into the operations of Newhouse's other fashion and celebrity magazines.

The *New Yorker* was profitable when the Fleischmann family sold it in 1985. It had become somewhat predictable and its circulation and profits were in slow decline, but it still was the country's best and most influential magazine. Its decline, in my view (as a contributor from 1971 to 1985) was due chiefly to its having become an anachronism in an American society greatly changed not only from 1925, when the magazine was founded, but from the 1940s and 1950s when it had found a new voice and authority under the influence of William Shawn, who became editor after the magazine's creator, Harold Ross, died in 1951.



"The 'Time' and 'Life' people are here, sir."

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Magazines do have a natural lifespan, connected to the society in which they exist. The *New Yorker* was a product of a certain America, parochial in its way, but very sure of itself, and sure of its identity, which by the 1980s was dissolving under pressures of cultural ideology and social division in the country, and which by now has all but disappeared. Today's is a television and entertainment age. The *New Yorker* was the creation of newspapermen, at a time when Americans read. Harold Ross had been an itinerant newspaperman, an ignorant one, he said, a hick from the West, who was interested in everything, and wanted to learn.

This curiosity made the *New Yorker* into the most important and original magazine of factual reporting that probably ever existed. Its writers went out to learn about and then write about absolutely any subject that interested them. It was always a writers' magazine. There was plenty of editing (when it was needed), and editorial conflict, but in the end the writer decided.

The newspaper heritage was responsible for the magazine's plain, eloquent, grammatically exact writing. Its understatement was influenced by the Midwestern literary naturalism that by the 1920s had become the dominant current in American modernism. Plain, exact writing was a reaction against the bombast and insincerity of much nineteenth-century "fine" writing, and was also an expression of that American instinct for an accessible "democratic" culture, a plain man's culture, expressed by Lincoln and Twain, among others.

The *New Yorker*, which Ross sometimes called a "comic paper," by publishing cartoons, humor, news of the racetrack and nightclubs, columns on golf, baseball, and football, together with serious nonfiction, and fiction, poetry, and literary and arts criticism, was simultaneously democratic and cosmopolitan.

The legacy of naturalism was responsible for the *New Yorker* short story, in which, supposedly, nothing happened. Of course a very great deal happened in a *New Yorker* short story, but the reader was expected to understand what had happened without being told about it. The same was true for the *New Yorker* sketch, or "casual." Katherine White, who went to work for Ross six months after the magazine began, was largely responsible for making it the most important influence of its time on American short fiction. She also pushed Ross to publish serious poetry, which, like fiction, has all but disappeared since 1992, when Tina Brown became editor.

What happened to the magazine's fortunes under Newhouse has a commercial explanation. He purchased it believing that he could reverse its decline and increase its profits. To demonstrate his confidence he raised circulation guarantees and advertising rates. To get the additional circulation, he bought it—which is to say, he sold cheap subscriptions which had to be renewed to become profitable. He was too proud to back down, so when subscriptions were not renewed he kept buying circulation. It was up to a reported 800,000 last year (as against 500,000 under Shawn, when the magazine was profitable). But this still is a fickle readership, or the magazine would not have lost $11 million last year—and a reported $100 million since Newhouse bought it.

Brown, who is undoubtedly the most brilliant tabloid editor of her day, took the magazine down-market, making it a brilliant and vulgar celebrity, gossip, and insider-dope politics magazine. She said "I do believe in lapses of taste. I firmly do." Her formula, which works elsewhere, has not worked for the *New Yorker*.

The *New Yorker* was created to succeed, but from the start commercial and editorial functions were scrupulously separated. No one has ever satisfactorily explained why so fundamentally serious a magazine should have become an enormously successful and profitable consumer magazine. Ross, and then Shawn, simply wanted to do something very good, and did so by letting others do the best work they could do. That is something very rare.

Since Newhouse and Brown have been in charge, when the only reason for publishing the magazine has been to make money, it has lost $100 million. The old *New Yorker* has its revenge. □

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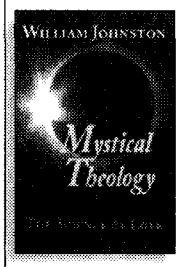
Spring Reading



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Jesus in the desert

Quarantine
Jim Crace
Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, $25, 256 pp.

Luke Timothy Johnson

Jim Crace has pulled off the literary equivalent of a perfect triple-triple jump in ice-skating. He has written a novel that has Jesus as its main character yet avoids reminding the reader of the Bible. Unlike all those lives of Jesus and historical Jesus reconstructions that end up making Jesus seem like a cardboard figure compared to the compelling and mysterious portrayals of him in the Gospels, Crace's tale draws the reader into an imaginative rendering that is so daring, so compelling, and so original, that in it Jesus really does seem human. The story has moments of pure beauty and ones of dreadful cruelty. But it never loses hold of the reader. Crace has constructed a story about Jesus that is at once utterly different from that in the Gospels yet utterly believable, that on the surface recasts everything yet at its depth somehow retains everything.

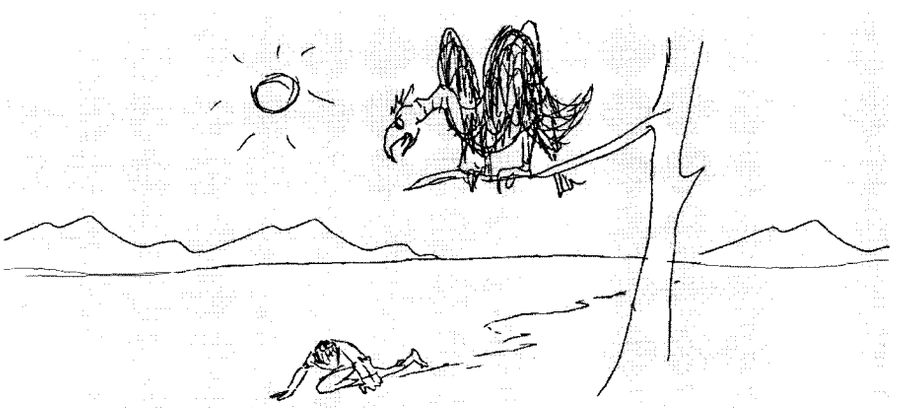
Like all good apocryphal authors, Crace seeks a gap or seam in the biblical narrative to exploit. He finds it in Jesus' fasting in the wilderness. Although Matthew and Luke narrate the encounters between Jesus and the tempter after his time of fasting, neither they nor Mark do more than report that Jesus fasted for forty days (Mark 1:12-13; Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). This time of "quarantine" provides the occasion for Crace's invention. Here are his fictional premises: First, the Judean desert is a place where people would spend a forty-day period of quarantine for religious purposes fasting in the ordinary manner—abstaining from food in the day but eating in the evening; second, Jesus is a young man barely past adolescence who is eager to be free of his village life and who embraces his fast in an extravagant and absolute fashion; third, Jesus and a collection of seekers (two women and four men) find themselves accidentally caught up in each other's lives.

Well, not entirely by accident. At the start of the quarantine, Jesus trails far behind the troupe of pilgrims heading toward the desert caves: Shim, the well-traveled religious adept seeking to add one more ordeal to his list of accomplishments; Marta, the voluptuous yet barren and scorned wife who seeks God's gift of fertility; Badu, the half-wild villager whose reasons for being there are never entirely clear since he cannot make himself understood; Aphas, the elderly Jew with cancer who desperately seeks a cure. Needing a final drink of water before his total fast, Jesus enters the tent of Musa the trader, who has been abandoned to die of a fever by his caravan, tended only by his pregnant and abused wife Miri. Miri wants Musa dead, and is out digging a grave when Jesus enters the tent. Sipping from the water bag, Jesus hears the dying groans of Musa and, almost casually, blesses him. This changes everything.

Jesus enters the highest and most remote cave to test his faith in God. He eats nothing, drinks nothing, will not leave the cave. Musa rises from his deathbed determined to use this wonder-worker as the means of recovering his fortune, directing all his guile to this end. Readers are drawn into the ensuing struggle by viewing the actions and sharing the fantasies spun by the minor male characters, the more prominent female characters, and above all by the *agonists* Musa and Jesus, the tempter and the tempted—they also have fantasies.

Musa is monstrous in size and appetite, driven by the passions of craven fear and murderous rage, a beater and raper of women, whose cunning captivates his companions and manipulates them in service to his fantasies: Jesus will be his ultimate product, his most spectacular traveling-salesman story! There is some small part of Musa in awe of the one who healed him, but it is swallowed (as are all his fears) by the rage to dominate and control.

Jesus, however, defines uncontrollability. As Jesus breaks from his boyhood, he is the exact opposite of Musa: totally



"You know, pal, I've got a feeling you're going to make it, much as I'd like to feel otherwise."

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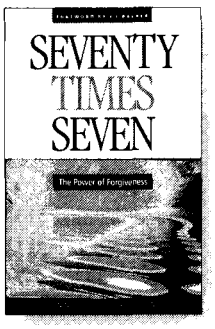
lacking in calculation, heedless of consequences, stripping himself of food, water, clothing, testing his experience against his fantasies, forging possible ways of being a prophet like those of old, and finally releasing reason itself as his wasted body drains juice also from his soul. Though he never leaves the cave, never accepts the invitations of the other pilgrims, Jesus is the still point around which all the plot's movements revolve.

Crace's portrayal of Jesus is the novel's most intriguing aspect. In contrast to all those fictional renderings of Jesus (for example, by Kazantzakis) that try to make him human by making him sexual, and only succeed in making him dull, Crace portrays Jesus as a youthful mystic whose intoxication with God in prayer draws him ever deeper into a divine addiction. He describes Jesus in prayer: "There were occasions, more mystifying, feverish, and blissful, when the language was unknown, a tripping, spittle-basted tongue, plosive and percussive and high pitched...he might feel his spirit soften and solidify at once. He was an egg immersed in boiling water, a fusing and dividing trinity of yoke and white and shell. In that respect, he was transformed by God like other boys his age were changed by girls." Jesus grows bored in his fast and plays board games with pebbles; he writes in the cave floor all the words he knows. In the extremity of starvation, he is afraid of what his heedless love has done.

The novel's epigraph quotes the opinion of two doctors concerning the possibility of a human surviving such an absolute fast without supernatural assistance. What happens to Jesus, and what happens to those whose lives for a period of quarantine hovered around his singular grasp for God, I leave to your reading. But I can say that the grave dug for the dying Musa—that served also as a surprising cistern to sustain the pilgrims—ends up serving still another function. And that everyone gets changed. It is, I assure you, different from anything you have yet imagined. And in its own way, is gospel. □

Luke Timothy Johnson *is the author of* The Real Jesus *(HarperSan Francisco).*

Spring Ploughing



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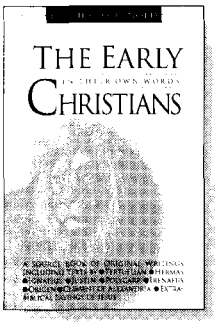

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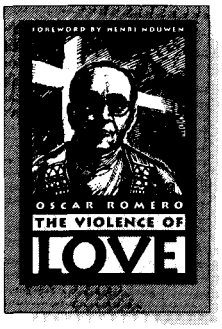

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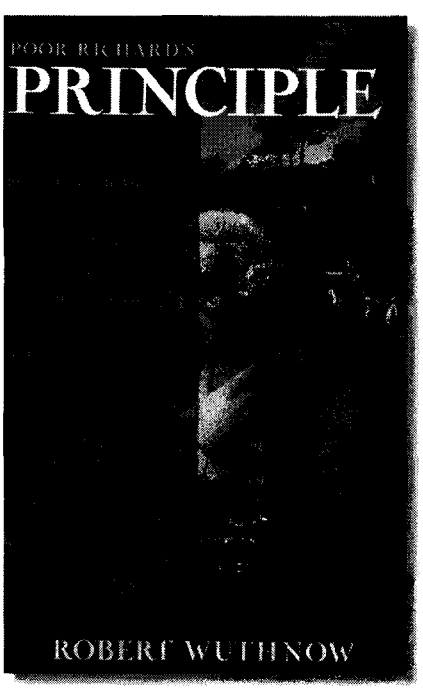

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ENOUGH ALREADY

Maybe One
An Environmental and Personal Argument for Single-Child Families
Bill McKibben
Simon & Schuster, $23, 240 pp.

Barbara Dafoe Whitehead

Overpopulation is not high on the list of problems Americans worry about. After all, the birth rate in the United States currently stands below replacement levels, and current demographic predictions, both here and in Europe, suggest that small families are here to stay. Even in third-world countries, the birth rate is declining.

Still, Bill McKibben is worried. We face a population crisis, he tells us, because Americans are living longer. Despite low birth rates, the population is likely to reach 400 million by 2020, nearly double its current size. This natural increase in population means that Americans will face a host of problems ranging from car-clogged highways to the collapse of the Social Security system. How do we prevent this demographic disaster? McKibben's solution is to call for a little procreative thrift: Give up the two-child-family. Stop after one.

This is hardly a new idea. Thirty years ago, Paul Ehrlich's best-selling book, *The Population Bomb*, called upon Americans to limit family size and to wage a campaign against big families. But the campaign never got off the ground, partly because fertility was already declining among Baby Boomers. A decade later, noting a rapid and unanticipated decline in the birth rate, Ehrlich proclaimed the population trend in the United States a "success story."

What is new and provocative is McKibben's rationale for only one-child families. These families would not only be good for the environment; they would also be good for children themselves. The advantage of siblings is vastly exaggerated, according to McKibben. Citing research studies on only children, he argues that they are likely to do better in school, have more friendships, display more flexibility in gender roles, show more interest in science, math, and literature, and have higher self-esteem than kids burdened with siblings.

McKibben is persuasive, in part because he is that rare thing: a passionate environmentalist and an eminently reasonable man. He is deeply concerned about the damages and depredations caused by too many people on too little land. At the same time, he resists the temptation to call for coercive government measures or even mild social pressures

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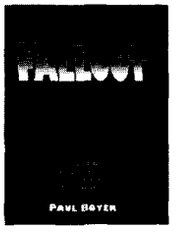

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to limit population. (He does advocate reducing the quotas on immigration, however.) Rather, his argument for the one-child family is an appeal to individual conscience and voluntary action. He asks men and women to think and talk about overpopulation in the most personal terms "as a matter of how many children you or I may bear."

McKibben is also persuasive because he practices what he so fervently preaches. The father of a four-year-old daughter, he decides to get a vasectomy. Though he acts on his principles, he confesses very human misgivings. One of the best parts of the book deals with his account of his unexpected bout of post-op tristesse. "There's no set of statistics to explain . . . why it felt odd, why it felt a little shameful, why it felt sad," he writes. Perhaps most impressive of all, McKibben does not try to claim moral-courage points for ending his own reproductive life.

Still his argument for the one-child family population solution is ultimately unconvincing. To begin with, he fails to contend seriously with a competing and well-supported scenario of population implosion. In a recent article in *The Public Interest*, Nicholas Eberstadt painstakingly documents a pattern of worldwide fertility decline and paints a futuristic portrait of a graying world population with over 55 percent of the world's women past reproductive age. Over a couple generations, he says, the impact of sustained low fertility could change the composition of the family itself. Children would grow up with parents and grandparents but would have no siblings, cousins, aunts, or uncles. Such a transformation of the family would surely have a profound impact on our sense of social solidarity, obligation, and future orientation, Eberstadt observes. And in America, the most individualistic nation in the world, this demographic trend could dramatically accelerate social atomization.

Too, McKibben's sweeping case against siblings is biased and distorted. He relies heavily upon a single study based on small clinical samples of individuals in therapy where sibling incest, aggression, and conflict figure far more prominently than they do in the general population. And he salts the clinical findings with evidence from sitcoms and his own anecdotes of fights with his brother. Given this highly selective reading of the evidence, it is not surprising that siblings fare so poorly.

But the chief problem with McKibben's argument is that it treats children as if they were costly consumer items on a par with cars. In his environmental calculus, there is very little difference between formula-guzzlers and gas-guzzlers. This devaluation of children also contributes to a devaluation of childrearing as an adult vocation. McKibben believes that there are better uses for adult energies and resources than raising a bunch of children. By limiting his own family to one, he is able to do other things: work on Adirondack conservation issues, belly-dance, and teach Sunday school. Indeed, he claims that having fewer children will free parents to make the world a better place. But there is no evidence to support the idea that parents with one child are more altruistic than parents with two or more. Nor is there evidence to suggest that limiting family size will reduce family consumption. McKibben's own exemplary conduct notwithstanding, I fear that a nation of Cleavers without Beaver may become a nation where June and Ward buy bigger houses and cars and dedicate themselves to doing their own thing. □

Barbara Dafoe Whitehead's *most recent book is* The Divorce Culture *(Knopf).*

A Love Song

In the photograph, the four of us stand together:
my grandmother, mother, and I
in a blurred circle of breasts, and my daughter,

hip-high in the foreground, smiling into the sun.
It is mid-summer ten years ago
when the mountain ash turned willow and wept

for a field to lie down in, holding ground
in a withering shroud of brown,
and we are certainly no different—

my mother, chin tilted against the tug
of years, and my grandmother's
groomed defiance giving in at the gumline.

What this picture doesn't speak of
is how my grandmother took
to wearing her husband's workboots when he died,

the hard-soled bathroom acoustics
echoing-up a heart.
Or how my mother, the mother of four,

routinely weeps for the child *not* living,
her eyes dammed up
to what's left. Or the reason why

my arms form a shawl for my daughter's
girl-thin shoulders,
grateful for a place to rest.

Michelle Moore

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INVENTING TIME, SELF & ETHICS

The Gifts of the Jews
How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels
Thomas Cahill
Doubleday, $23.50, 391 pp.

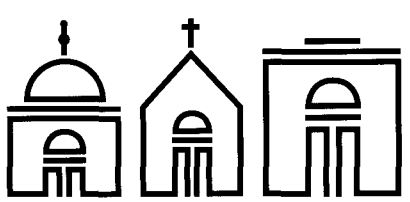
Paul Gediman

In 1996, a short book with a long title became a surprise bestseller. Thomas Cahill's *How the Irish Saved Civilization: The Untold Story of Ireland's Heroic Role from the Fall of Rome to the Rise of Medieval Europe* told the story of the Christianization of Ireland and of the subsequent effort of the island's warrior-monks and scribes to preserve the literature of the classical world—indeed literacy itself—while the rest of Europe succumbed to waves of book-burning barbarians. An energetic blend of scholarly erudition and storytelling flair, the book was widely and justly celebrated for shedding light on the Dark Ages and for honoring Ireland's unacknowledged role in the history of Western civilization. It turns out to have been just the first in a planned seven-book series called the *Hinges of History*. Apparently, Cahill wants to be the next Jacob Bronowski, the next great popularizer of Western history, the messenger who carries the news from the library to the cocktail party. It's an honorable calling, so long as readers understand that Cahill is less interested in telling them what happened than he is in telling them the *meaning* of what happened.

In *The Gifts of the Jews*, the second book in the series, Cahill calls the Jews "the inventors of Western culture." The new book is even better than the first, largely because the history he addresses accommodates Cahill's strengths as an interpreter without calling too much attention to his shortcomings as a chronicler. Cahill's Jews are the prophetic Jews of the Torah. He doesn't take his reader beyond the destruction of the Second Temple or into the subsequent development of rabbinical Judaism. He doesn't even take us up to the time of Jesus. He confines himself to the Hebrew Bible, and then only to the good parts (mercifully skipping, for example, all the ritualistic prescriptions of Leviticus). The one great flaw of *How the Irish Saved Civilization* was that, in moving so fluidly between history and myth for the sake of narrative cohesion, Cahill played loose with the distinction between recorded event and legend—at one point, in the midst of a passage dealing with presumably factual events, portraying Brendan the Navigator "supping on the back of a whale in mid-ocean." In *The Gifts of the Jews*, however, Cahill openly treats the Bible as a literary document, a narrative that reveals the heart of the evolving Judaic world view. While even people exposed to a good college core curriculum might scratch their heads at the mention of the sixth-century Irish monks Columcille and Columbanus, nearly everyone has some notion, however incomplete or muddled, of Abraham and Moses. We know these stories, and we're ripe for a learned and personable articulation of their place at the heart of our own culture.

To this end, Cahill emphasizes three features in particular as the gifts of the Jews: the notion of historical time; the individual sense of self; and the moral foundation laid down by the Ten Commandments.

While it's neither particularly provocative nor even new to attribute these "gifts" to the Jews, Cahill brings to the task of illustrating them a winning enthusiasm. He starts his narrative in ancient Sumer to show us the pagan world. The Sumerians, Cahill tells us, viewed time as cyclical and saw themselves not as autonomous individuals capable of free will but as shadows of a higher reality transpiring in the heavens above them. Cahill spends twenty pages recounting the *Epic of Gilgamesh* in order to say of the Sumerians that "Even their stories miss a sense of development: they begin in the middle and end in the middle." But stories, and the way people viewed themselves, changed forever with Genesis and Exodus. "In the two great narratives of the first two books of the Bible," writes Cahill, "Israel invents not only history but the New as a positive value." Cahill makes fine work of describing how revolutionary it was for



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Abraham—a "skeptical, worldly patriarch"—to leave the urban comforts of Ur for the unknown frontier simply because a disembodied voice told him to, and he notes that God's promises to Abraham—that he will have a son, that his descendants will flourish—imply a revolutionary sense of the future. He further develops this idea in his discussion of the scene in Exodus in which God reveals his name to Moses. Rather than the King James Bible, which translates YHWH as "I am who I am," Cahill uses Everett Fox's translation (published by Schocken in 1997 as *The Five Books of Moses*), which reads "I-will-be-there-with-you."

While both Abraham and Moses engaged in distinct relationships with God, it is King David who, in Cahill's reading, emerges as the first fully individualized character in the Bible. "We know him," he writes, describing David in language we can almost hear as a voice-over for a future PBS documentary on Bill Clinton: "David's endless vitality and enthusiasm are the very qualities that endear him to the common people.... But a man who loves a crowd is seldom as effective in intimate relationships as he is in the midst of the throng. The histories of politics, sports, and entertainment are replete with such figures, triumphant in public, tragic in private." Indeed, the Bible does depict David as a man with very particular virtues and flaws, and many of the first-person Psalms are attributed to David himself. Cahill revels in this, seeing the Bible's discovery of individual character (which he identifies not only in David but also in Job and Ruth) as a revolutionary step forward from the static archetypes of pagan myth. It's this notion of self, he asserts, which makes the biblical moral vision so profound. Borrowing from Martin Buber, Cahill writes: "the people who became the Jews could begin to go from the I of David to the I of the spirit to the I of the individual to the I of compassion-for-the-I-of-others." From there, it's a very small step for Cahill to make the final, universalizing point that—whether or not we believe in God—the voice heard by Abraham and Moses, the "still, small voice" heard by the prophet Elijah, is "the Conscience of the West."

Some readers may object that Cahill universalizes what is properly the story of a particular tribe and that he offers the classic Christian reading according to which the drama of the Bible concerns not the redemption of the Jews but, ultimately, the redemption of the individual soul. He does universalize, and he does offer a Christian reading. But he's up front about it and makes no claims to be writing a history of Jews, Judaism, or even the Bible. In this age of clamorous identity politics, there's something refreshingly big-hearted about the first two *Hinges of History* books, both of which manage to give cultural particularity its due while eloquently embracing the respective contributions of the Jews and the Irish as part of the common inheritance of the West. □

Paul Gediman's *reviews have appeared in the* Boston Review *and the* Forward.

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UP, UP & AWAY

Enduring Love
Ian McEwan
Nan A. Talese/Doubleday, $23.95, 262 pp.

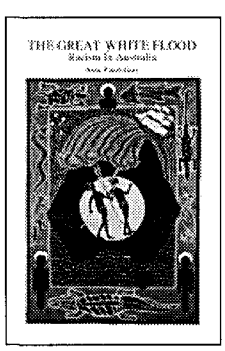
Valerie Sayers

Ian McEwan's elegant, unsettling novels seek out the dangers that lurk, waiting to disrupt everyday lives: child snatchers, accidents, vicious animals, stalkers. These threatening motifs are connected, often implicitly, to questions of political and philosophical belief. In *Enduring Love* this connection is explicit: from the opening scene onward, it is clear that McEwan means to balance his usual Gothic elements with complex explorations of the ideas they represent. The novel opens in a field in the Chilterns, where five men see a balloon descend and race to help the inept pilot anchor it. Inside the passenger basket crouches a terrified young boy who may be swept away at any moment. The men grab ropes and are themselves carried off, dangling from the balloon, by a violent gust. In the agonizing seconds that follow, they must decide whether to hold on together or to save themselves by dropping, singly, to the ground. The narrator and protagonist of the novel, Joe Rose, explores the accident's connection to notions of selfless love, community, and self-preservation. The balance between dramatic scene and philosophical narrative, between exterior reality and interior struggle, is beautifully achieved; this is as stunning and promising a novel opening as I have read.

Joe is one of the men who chooses to drop to the ground, and so must face his own ordinary cowardice, but that is only the beginning of his dilemma. As the plot progresses, it appears that so, too, will the tensions between the rational and the irrational. Joe is a science writer who has abandoned the academic world for the life of the free-lance popularizer. His belief in the rational is absolute. His wife Clarissa, a Keats scholar, is more interested in the intuitive and the emotional. ("You're so rational sometimes," she tells him, "you're like a child.") This standard assigning of sex roles might be irritating were it not for the casting of Keats's long romantic shadow in the novel— and were it not for a third principal character, Jed Parry, who disrupts all notions of assigned sex roles. Parry is another of the men who drops to the ground with Joe Rose in the failed rescue attempt. At the scene of the accident, he falls instantly and pathologically in love with Joe and begins to

American Academy of Religion

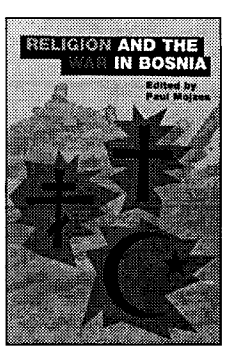
The Great White Flood
Racism in Australia
Anne Pattel-Gray



"Pattel-Gray's overriding concern is psychological and educational empowerment of aboriginal Australians. This is a thorough study of racial and social issues which are essential considerations as Australians work to bring about cohesion, empowerment and cooperation in achieving economic, political and social equality for all Australians."
—*Edward J. Perkins, University of Oklahoma, and former US Ambassador to Australia*

This volume examines the impact of racist government legislation and policies upon the indigenous people of Australia over the last 200 years. Racism in Australia is rooted in the long and corrupt relationship between government and church. The persistence of racism in every area of Australian society is documented, from government to schools to courts to churches, and the illusory humanitarian and human rights stances of both institutions are here exposed. The author argues that racism is an endemic and chronic problem that must be addressed and solved. This book defines and clarifies racist terminology and language, reviews historical and contemporary expressions of Australian racism, and assesses both the concept and the recent process of reconciliation in Australia.

Code: 01 07 02 328 pages (1998)
Paper: $24.95 ISBN: 0-7885-0133-X



Religion and the War in Bosnia
Paul Mojzes, editor

This book provides a bold exploration of the religious dimensions of genocide and contemporary ethnic warfare. Seventeen American and Balkan scholars representing a wide variety of perspectives—Muslim, Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and secular—examine the role of religion in the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Code: 011203 306 pages (1998)
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Paper: $19.95 ISBN: 0-7885-0428-2

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disrupt his life: phoning, writing, stalking, and finally attacking him.

Part of Jed Parry's disturbance is religious belief, and one of the novel's early promises is the possibility that Joe's rationalism will be seriously challenged by religious faith. But Jed's religion, as Joe points out, is "dreamily vague on the specifics of doctrine.... a self-made affair, generally aligned to the culture of personal growth and fulfillment." It is also the belief of a madman, and as such Parry's challenges are hardly taken seriously, either by Joe or by the novel. Parry's affliction is identified as de Clerambault's syndrome, in which the sufferers believe that the objects of their desire return the love and send secret signals of reciprocation. Parry's religious belief, as hopelessly deluded as his erotic fixation, is a variant of the syndrome.

It's an interesting notion, this coupling of erotic and religious delusion, but because the religious aspect is expressed only in Jed Parry's melodramatic pronouncements, it can't be explored physically (or for that matter philosophically) in the same way that the idea of human love can be. One of the principal tensions of the novel, then, is eased out early, and it becomes clear that rationalism will not be tested by religious faith but by faith in human love, the possibility of "enduring love" that Joe Rose believes he and Clarissa can achieve.

Clarissa, though, is seriously disturbed by Joe's response to Parry. At first she believes Parry's only a pathetic character; later she wonders whether Joe is in fact inventing his obsessive presence. The novel moves from another interesting tension (why can't the sensitive, intelligent Clarissa understand that Joe's terror is in fact a completely rational response?) to a more predictable movement of plot (will she believe him in time to save them from Parry's violence?). Clarissa's role in the novel, though key, is not explored in nearly as much depth as Joe's or Parry's. She is sketched, believably, as Keats scholar and as a maternal figure who cannot bear children (the motif of children—especially as objects of selfless love—is one of the most successful), but her lack of faith in Joe is not entirely convincing. It seems more plot-driven than it does character-driven: it is necessary for the story to progress, therefore it exists.

The same complaint might be made of the last scenes of the novel, thrilling, amusing, and unsettling though they are. Joe buys a gun in a funny and depressing scene that seems to come out of another (naturalistic) novel, then sets out to rescue Clarissa. The story has begun, of course, with a bungled rescue, and one of the novel's concerns is the strange movement of narrative itself: narrative in science, narratives of grief, narratives of the imagination. It is fitting, then, that narrative might loop

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back on itself this way, but the story floats away as quickly as the balloon which set Joe Rose's ordeal in motion, and the current carrying it is plot. The ideas trying to anchor that plot drop one by one to the ground. Some of its most disturbing suggestions (this is not the first time McEwan has used homosexual desire as his central threat) are never fully explored. The story ends with the notion of forgiveness, but it's a partial resolution, for poor Jed Parry is locked away with his delusions, and neither narrator nor narrative is concerned with what forgiveness or peace might be offered him.

This is not to say that *Enduring Love* is not engaging throughout—it is more than engaging, it is clever and compelling—but rather that it is considerably lightened at the end of its journey, that its balance tips, finally, toward the pleasures of unburdened plot. □

Valerie Sayers *is professor of English at the University of Notre Dame. Her most recent novel is* Brain Fever *(Doubleday).*

LORD PETER ❤ HARRIET

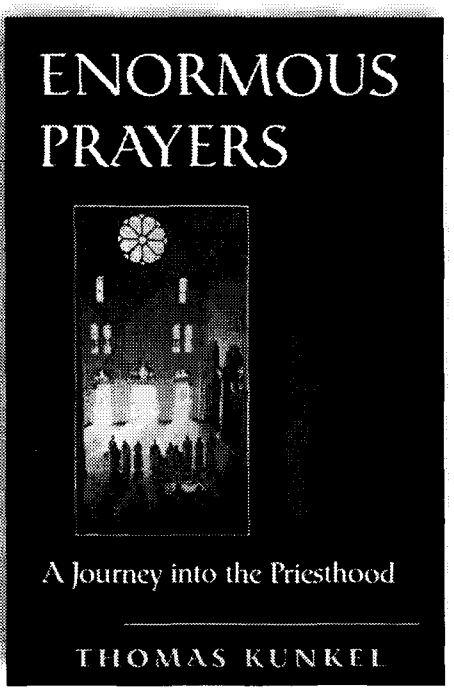
Thrones and Dominations
Dorothy Sayers & Jill Paton Walsh
St. Martins Press, $24.95, 312 pp.

Elizabeth Bartelme

Long ago (or so it seems) I approached Dorothy Sayers's *Gaudy Night* as one might open the *Iliad*. I failed to read it. Sayers's hero, Lord Peter Wimsey, appeared precious beyond reason, and his love-interest Harriet Vane's problems hardly worth solving. But that was yesterday; so much for first impressions. *Thrones and Dominations*, Sayers's unfinished novel, completed by Jill Paton Walsh (*Knowledge of Angels*), sent me back not only to *Gaudy Night*, but to *The Nine Tailors*, surely the most imaginative mystery novel of the twentieth century.

In these books Sayers was in top form so perhaps a fair comparison cannot be made with this new/old work. Nevertheless, if not one of her peak performances, *Thrones* has a high entertainment quotient, and its probing exploration of various concerns of Sayers raise it to the level of a serious literary work.

Harriet Vane, the unlikely sleuth, now married to Lord Peter, continues to write her detective stories, but she worries about their value, about their moral worth. Peter reassures her, telling her that they represent a "dream of justice, an ideal that had to be kept alive in a very unjust and dangerous world. . . ." So Harriet must "make murder most



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foul—the victim real—and pitiful." Harriet is willing, but she faces strong opposition from the Duchess of Denver, Peter's sister-in-law, who wants her to get busy and provide an heir and stop this nonsense about writing. Inevitably the two women clash and Harriet comes down strongly on the side of the independent, educated woman—the one who can earn her own living, if necessary, and who does not need a man simply to lean on.

These themes inform the novel, giving a clear picture of Sayers's preoccupations. They are further underlined by the setting of the story in Lord Peter's London townhouse and the various clubs and restaurants frequented by the upper classes. Sayers's wit and her way with eccentric characters have full play here, as Harriet makes her way through a thicket of snobbish in-laws and new acquaintances.

One of the latter is the beautiful Rosamund Harwell, half of the most romantic couple in London. Lovely Rosamund, while spending a weekend in the country alone, is found dead by her distraught husband. Why has she been killed? She is an innocent woman with nothing in her past to condemn her. But the table in the cottage is set for two and Rosamund herself is found in bed. Has she been having an affair? The suspects, a playwright madly in love with her, and an artist who has been painting her portrait, have each followed her to her cottage, but neither will admit knowledge of her death. Other potential murderers are equally mum.

At this point the entire Wimsey household goes into action. Lord Peter confers with his brother-in-law, Chief Inspector Charles Parker; Harriet works out theories, while her maid, Mango, goes hunting clues; and Bunter, Lord Peter's faithful valet, backs up his master. The solution, as one might guess, is not the expected one and as offbeat as any dreamed up in the past by this clever puzzler. Meanwhile, the reader is taken on a tour of the London sewer system which is as frightening as it is fascinating. Bunter is stuck with diligently scrubbing Peter until he is fit for human companionship again. And when he is,

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Harriet has news for him—news that the alert reader will have guessed several chapters earlier.

That is not the only news. Bunter has fallen in love with an attractive young photographer, but they have decided to give up one another in the interests of Lord Peter who can't manage without Bunter. Harriet takes charge here and works out a pragmatic solution that suits all parties, thus providing a happy and romantic ending in which the murderer, now confined to a cell, exonerates Rosamund from any wrongdoing.

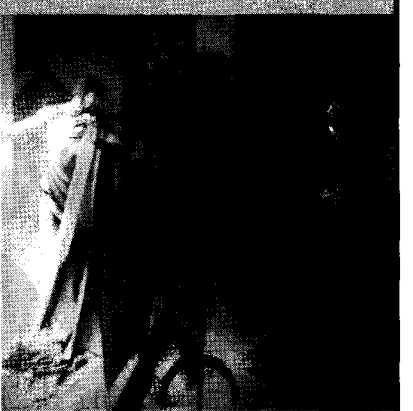
One of the more interesting aspects of the book is the 1930s ambience that it evokes. We have the death of King George V, the reluctance of Edward VIII to take over the throne without Mrs. Simpson at his side, and all of London dressed in black. Sayers has used the latter effectively to forward her plot. My favorite scene, however, is Lord Peter, working for the Foreign Office and flying off to France in a Piper Cub to get important papers from the negligent king. The fog, we are told, streams away from the little plane like steam streaming from a kettle. On a more sober note, Hitler has begun to make his moves and rumors of war are filling the air.

Jill Paton Walsh has taken all these elements and stitched together Dorothy Sayers's work with her own contribution to make a coherent whole. The result is seamless, if slightly sentimental, owing to the affectionate exchanges between the newly married Harriet and Peter. Her additions, however, are cogent and very much in the Sayers manner, including enough quotations to warrant a new Bartlett's edition. Walsh has taken an unfinished manuscript and produced a most effective exit work for the writer who was arguably the preeminent mystery novelist of our time. □

Elizabeth Bartelme, *a long-time* Commonweal *contributor, lives in New York.*

Why Julian Now?

A Voyage of Discovery



SHEILA UPJOHN

JULIAN OF NORWICH wrote her *Revelations of Divine Love* in a small room on a Norwich backstreet 600 years ago. Yet there is astonishing interest in Julian today, and her book continues to be widely read. But why? What possible relevance could the writing of this "unlettered woman" have for us in today's troubled world, a world vastly different from medieval England? This question so challenged Sheila Upjohn, a recognized authority on Julian, that she embarked on a quest to answer the question *Why Julian Now?*

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CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 4)

tims of the notorious *rappresàglia* are buried. There are the 300 victims called for by Hitler after the murder of thirty SS troopers by a terrorist. These people were chosen at random; among them were three Catholic priests. Urgent appeals were made to Pius to intercede on their behalf. He was silent.

There can be no apology without honesty.

(MSGR.) JOSEPH G. BAILEY
Redwood, N.Y.

Laity teaching religion

As a teacher and as religion department chair in a Catholic high school, I found Father Francis J. Principe's report ["Teaching Religion," April 10] of his experience consistent with the general perceptions of my colleagues who have been in the classroom as long as he has, and I applaud his conclusion concerning the contributions of lay teachers of religion. However, I am puzzled by a few of his statements in support of that conclusion. If lay participation in teaching religion is a gift of the Spirit, and if lay status helps students look to lay teachers as spiritual confidants and as models of Christian living, why then are lay teach-

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ers of religion indispensable "simply because there are no longer enough priests and religious to staff the classrooms?" And why is Father Principe surprised at their level of expertise, not only in religion but in history and education?

As he writes, "things are different now," but maybe one thing that is not different is an unconscious attitude toward lay people that has not changed at all.

EDWARD W. ATKINSON, JR.
Hatfield, Pa.

CTSA's authority

With regard to the Dulles-Donovan-Steinfels disputation on "How Catholic is the CTSA?" I think it worth noting that theologians by and large are professors of an academic discipline which is, as such, independent of the authority of both church and state. It would seem to follow that the Catholic Theological Society of America has about as much authority and is entitled to about as much deference as the American Political Science Association.

FRANCIS CANAVAN, S.J.
Bronx, N.Y.

The writer is professor emeritus of political science at Fordham University.

God & bad arguments

Referring to "Disputed Questions" [March 27], and harking back to my days in philosophy, I can almost hear my professor saying, "Here is a good example of how to argue philosophically and how not to do so."

The first rule (if I recall correctly) is to refer to the exact words of your opponent. Avery Dulles seems to refer to his "opponents'" attitudes and personalities rather than to the actual words used to express their ideas. Adjectives and adverbs used with the quotes (sarcastically, sharply, castigated, idiosyncratic, etc.) refer to personality traits rather than ideas.

Mary Ann Donovan, on the other hand, quotes the authors' exact words about important thoughts rather than personal feelings. After reading both critiques, with no further information on the proceedings of the convention, I must admit that Avery Dulles was much less convincing in his arguments than was Mary Ann Donovan.

PHILLIP WINDOLPH
Burbank, Ill.

Theology in decline

The remarks of Avery Dulles on the present state of the CTSA are right on target. The discipline traditionally called theology is rapidly being replaced by religious studies; the scriptural canon is roundly ignored in favor of extracanonical norms which are used to judge the scriptural canon; a reverence for tradition is seen as wooden-headed; no interpretations are deemed scholarly unless they stem from a hermeneutic of suspicion; the critical role of theology, while well-preserved, is no longer directed toward members of the CTSA and their offerings but toward the pope and bishops. The CTSA is becoming an AAR—Another Academy of Religion. I would not mind this shift if it were just a question of the CTSA. After all, societies come and go. What concerns me is the already unhappy impact of the CTSA on

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college and university campuses. It is not infrequent to meet a teacher of theology who questions the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as revelation of God and who is teaching our high school graduates, not well-trained in catechetics, to rethink traditional claims in the context of the religions of the world. Catholic academic institutions are reflecting on their Catholic identity. Obviously, an important aspect of such identity is located in the theology departments. This is what makes the observation of Dulles so important. Is there such a reality as Catholic theology? If the answer is yes, the overriding issue underlying the Dulles article concerns the very nature of that theology—the long-time, many-faceted activity, in the church and at the service of the church, called faith in search of intelligence.

(REV.) JOHN J. CONNELLY
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THE COMMUNION DRESS

Kathleen Hage

Every once in a while it is given a long nostalgic look when someone is rummaging through in the attic looking for the crynoline slip or the prom dress or the formal winter coat, or simply ridding the place of clothes that have definitely outlived their use. On each visit the "Communion dress" is fondly passed over and allowed to inhabit the storage space a little longer, just in case.

Now it has happened. The oldest grandchild will make her First Communion and her mother asks if "the dress" is still available. Could this dress, purchased for our own child before Vatican II, still be relevant to the current celebration of First Communion?

Putting theology aside for the moment, it is evident that the abandoned dress needs some attention if our decisive little seven-year-old will be convinced of its loveliness. Far from brilliant white, it even has some brown spots and a slight tear on the shoulder seam. Carefully, it is lowered into a bathtub of tepid water and special soap, swished, and squeezed. There is little improvement, and it is left to soak. After several hours of kid-glove handling there seems to be nothing to lose, and a full-fledged bleach treatment is applied. It works beautifully. The dress is starched, pressed, and hung up for inspection by the red-haired candidate.

The dress was purchased in 1961 for the oldest child of the family, an occasion happily remembered by both mother and daughter. With several younger siblings left at home, the shopping trip with just the two of us alone was extraordinary. The first stop was the upscale department store, just to see what sort of white dress was being offered to the fashionable communicant. The dress she tried on was organdy with eyelet trim on the bodice, simple and exactly what both of us had hoped to find. But it was so expensive. We hung it up on the rack again and left the store to visit every white-dress shop on the avenue, each one exhibiting a frock more elaborate than the last and utterly smothering her fair face and long braids.

Stopping at the lunch counter to reconsider all we had seen, we nourished our sagging spirits. An egg-salad sandwich still holds a special significance for both of us. A decision must be made, and it is remarkable how responsible and mature that first child is expected to be. It was that first dress to which we both gravitated and the cost could be rationalized by the number of younger sisters who would wear it. The mutual agreement sent us scurrying back to the store to find the dress still available (the closer we came the more sure we were it had been sold). We paid the price and proudly headed home. The dress was resoundingly approved and held its own in the Communion procession.

Was the cost justified by the use of the dress for the First Communions of the younger girls? Skipping a son, the next daughter (and mother of the grandchild now in need of a Communion dress) wore the dress two years later, lengthened to accommodate her height. The third daughter, however, was in the same class because she had skipped a grade. She borrowed a dress from a dear friend, looked radiant, and was characteristically happy with the arrangement.

A boy was next in line, but a year later the dress was again removed from its plastic covering. Whereas the last occupant had been the tallest child in the family, this one was the smallest. So the hem went back up, past its point of original setting. Two more boys and a move from a Southern town to a big city on the East Coast intervened before the next female communicant. It was 1972, Vatican II directives were in full swing, women were pushing traditional limits, and our current seven-year-old had no intention of wearing the "Communion dress." She walked down the aisle in bright white pants.

Later still, this child's younger three sisters all donned the dress, but under up-dated circumstances. Their preparation for First Communion was not through the parish school but through our Christian Family Movement group. Vatican II had ordained that the faithful, as true witnesses to Christ, were "strictly obliged to spread the faith by word and deed." Thus, the second youngest wore the dress but received her First Communion at home during a Mass celebrated by her priest uncle, a liturgy that marked the importance of the domestic church. Our dress was participating in some heady times.

In 1980, our youngest child proudly put on the dress to be the single recipient of First Communion at a Mass in church. By then, the excitement and experimentation motivated by Vatican II had subsided and this little girl felt strongly that her community was those with whom she celebrated Sunday liturgy in church, rather than the schoolmates who would receive First Communion at a special Mass apart.

The "Communion dress" has observed the progress of the family through religious tranquillity and tumult, but has always managed to rise to the occasion. Now it has arrived at the next generation. The 1998 class of communicants will process down the aisle and look much like that 1961 procession. But this ceremony will be a culmination of a full year's preparation involving the families, including a day-long activity underscoring the communal aspect of the Eucharist. The Spirit continues to blow through the church.

The dress is ready for inspection. Her eyes light up, she exclaims, she tries it on. Alas, it is altogether too small. □

Kathleen Hage *lives in Washington, D.C.*

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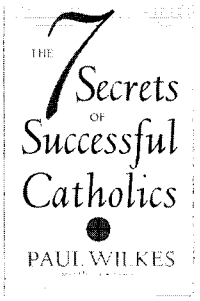

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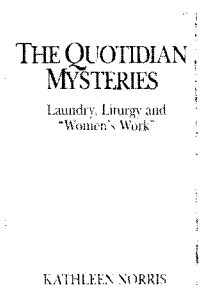

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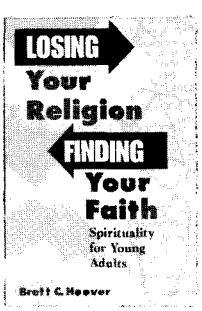

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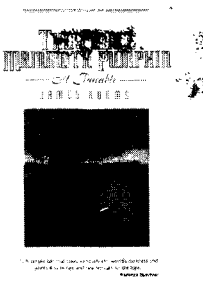

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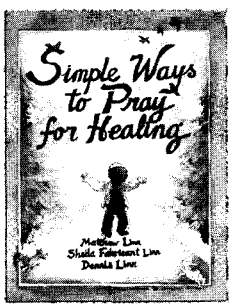

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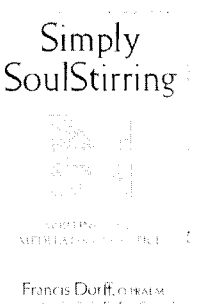

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